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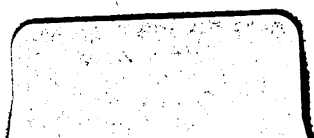
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LESS BLACK THAN WE'RE PAINTED

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A Novel

By JAMES PAYN

AUTHOR OF

"WON—NOT WOODED" "WHAT HE COST HER" "MURPHY'S MASTER" "BY PROXY"
"CECIL'S TRYST" "A BEGGAR ON HORSEBACK" "BEST OF
HUSBANDS" "AT HER MERCY" &c.

"After all, man is man; he is not wicked, and he is not good; by no means white as snow, but by no means black as coal; black *and* white, piebald, striped, dubious."—SWINEBURNE.



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LESS BLACK THAN WE'RE PAINTED,

CHAPTER I.

A SERIOUS DINNER.

THERE is a Gresham Street in the West End of London as well as in the East, but of a very different type. It must have been named after some person who had no connection, however indirect, with commerce; for it is aristocratic to its very scrapers. The houses are huge, but gloomy; their windows (far from large, and rarely of plate-glass) have probably never beheld an omnibus. The walls are black with age and soot, for nothing is ever done to them in the way of painting; only from time to time some men come with a ladder and affix, with as little noise as possible, a hatchment to the front of them. I don't know the time that hatchments ought to "hang" (as the cooks say), but those in Gresham Street remain a very long time, so much so that to an irreverent mind the neighborhood often resembles a congeries of public-houses, with Death for their sign-boards. In front of them still project the iron "quenchers," formerly used for extinguishing the flambeaux of the footmen. There is gas in the street, of course, but in the mansions themselves one would as soon expect to find petroleum in domestic use.

The wave of fashion has retired from the place, and left it stranded; but it has a dignity of its own that rises above all frivolous change, and contemns it. Even in summer the doors do not stand open as in Belgravia, affording to the ravished eye the spectacle of powdered minions in splendid apparel; they swing noiselessly back as some ancient chariot with far-spreading hammer-cloth stops to discharge its stately burden—generally a dowager; and having swallowed her, they close again. The process is very similar to what will happen when she pays her last visit to her ancestral mansion.

No house-agent can appraise these tenements, for they are never sold. Such a sacrilege as a sale by auction, at all events, has never been heard of in connection with them. If they are disposed of, it is by "private contract," which is kept as dead a secret as the existence of the family spectre—of which there are, no doubt, many specimens in this locality. The mansions are all freehold. A ninety-nine years' lease would be looked upon in Gresham Street as evanescent an arrangement as is taking lodgings by the week in Piccadilly.

The furniture is solid, ponderous, and would be invaluable in Paris—for barricades; otherwise it has nothing Parisian about it. The mirrors, though not numerous, are very large, and they intensify the gloom by multiplying it.

In the drawing-room of No. 80, which would with ease accommodate two hundred persons—and if fashion held sway there, would doubtless be made, at what is very literally termed "a pinch," to hold five hundred—there are, on the evening on which our story opens, but three individuals.

An old lady, with snow-white hair and venerable appearance, but whose attitude, as she sits in her stiff-backed chair, still shows strength and vigor, is engaged upon some fancy-work—an occupation, one would imagine, fitter for younger eyes. Her dress is handsome, but old-fashioned; though in a year or two it will be once more the rage, for it is made up of those recurrent materials, silk and lace—lace on her shoulders, lace on the high collar round her neck, and a lace cap that looks yellower than even time has made it, by contrast with her silver hair. Though dignified-looking, her face has an air at once pathetic and benevolent; like one who, having known trouble herself for many a year, recognizes its trace in others, and has pity on them.

The second occupant of the apartment is also a lady; she is much younger than her companion—indeed, she is scarcely beyond middle-age—and yet in some respects exhibits fewer signs of youth. The elder has a bright eye, a cheerful voice, and at times, though rarely, a genial smile, that show the heart within is still warm and tender. The younger is very grave and taciturn; her expression, though not morose, is austere; the face, thin, pale, and delicate, bears tokens of physical pain; her voice, though sad and gentle, is, for a woman's, singularly resolute. There is firmness, too, for those who can read it, in the lines about her mouth. Curiously enough, while the elder lady is doing fancy work, the younger is stitching with needle-and-thread at some plain linen. Her attire, too, has no ornament about it whatever, unless a large white cross suspended by a ribbon from her neck can be so entitled. She is dressed in the close-fitting, black and gray garments of a Protestant Sister of Mercy.

The third person in the room, and who has only just entered it, is one of severe and pompous

aspect, and would, perhaps, be set down by a superficial observer as the spiritual superior of the other two; but whereas he is, in fact, but Mr. Duncombe, the butler.

"Dinner is served, my lady."

"Does his lordship, then, dine at the club?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Then we may as well go down, Edith."

This formula, so far as Duncombe and his mistress are concerned, has been repeated every evening for the last twenty years, for, as a matter of fact, Lord Earnshaw, his master, has been dead for that period. Every one knows it except her ladyship, who still clings to the fond belief that he is still alive, and acting as he was wont to do while in the flesh. If this were so, nothing is certainly less likely than that he should be dining at home. Lord Earnshaw had never been a domestic man, and had left the world under the saddest circumstances—with another man's wife. She had joined him on board his yacht, in which they had set sail for the Mediterranean, and the *Sans Souci* had gone down, "with all her crew complete" (six men and a boy, besides her master and his mistress), in the Bay of Biscay. The tidings were broken to his widow, doubtless as tenderly as might be, but the sorrow and the shame were more than she could bear. Something, it was popularly said, had given way in her brain in connection with this particular subject, while all else was firm. Psychologically, this did not seem improbable, for the love she had borne her husband had been a thing apart from the rest of her life, and, though that chord was snapped, it might well be that the other strings of being remained unbroken, though, alas! without their music. He had left her for the last time with some reference to dining at his club—he was, in fact, about to start for Southampton—and to this her mind attached itself. She imagined every day that this had happened but a few hours ago, and her servants were instructed not to interfere with her fond delusion. His lordship's study was arranged each morning as it was wont to be when he had tenanted it; his newspaper was cut and placed upon his desk; his boots in winter-time put near the fire.

Some people thought that of late years the truth had slowly dawned upon his unhappy widow. She put the same question to the butler every evening still, but without the sigh that had of old accompanied it. The poor soul, they said, though conscious of her weakness, felt ashamed, after so many years, to acknowledge it. But Edith Talbot, her niece, was not of this opinion. She believed Lady Earnshaw's faith was as firm as ever that her husband was in the flesh, and only thought that he was neglecting her somewhat more than usual. Under these circumstances, it behooved her, for his sake, not to appear to pine, but to bear herself bravely. On other points Lady Earnshaw was as sane as other people, and on some much saner. She had had in early life a genuine gift of humor, and even now an occasional gleam would leap out from some corner of her mind, half playful, half pathetic. Her heart was as tender to the woes of others as before it had been broken, but its solicitudes had ceased. She had no nervous fears—of old she *had been full of them*—for the welfare of those *she loved; she let the world more on around*

her, without attempting to set right what was amiss in it; and she smiled, though very kindly, at those who still endeavored so to do.

Indeed, it was difficult for any two good women to have less in common than Lady Earnshaw and "Sister Edith" (as she called herself), but each esteemed and loved the other. Edith, though herself a person of strong practical piety, had a secret respect for the delusion under which the elder lady labored with respect to her dead husband. "It was better," she said, "to treat the dead as living, than the living, as so many did, as though they were in another world or not of the same flesh and blood." Nay, though she knew her uncle by marriage to have been an absolutely worthless scoundrel, she did not think him past praying for even yet; whereas her aunt, had she thought her husband dead, would certainly have ceased to pray for him.

Almost every act of the lives of these two persons was performed with a difference. As they sat down to table, for example, on the present occasion, Lady Earnshaw bent down over her plate, murmured a few words, as it seemed, to the napkin outside of it, and then proceeded to help the soup. Sister Edith, on the other hand, stood up, folded her hands across her bosom, and uttered a long, though inaudible, benediction.

"My dear," said her hostess, smiling, and speaking in the French language, as they always did before the servants, "you remind me of old Lord Earnshaw's chaplain, who used to say his form of grace according to the character of the fare set before him. If it was a family dinner, he said, 'For what we are going to receive;' if he saw the long glasses which foretold some sparkling beverage, he would begin, 'Bountiful Jehovah.'"

"I am afraid he must have been an indifferent priest, Aunt Mildred."

"Well, he was certainly not very devout; he only reminded me of yourself, of course, in the particular I mentioned."

"Do I, then, alter my grace if there are long glasses?" inquired Sister Edith, in that somewhat lugubrious tone which religious persons assume when respect forbids them to reprove a transgressor.

"My dear Edith, you are very literal," said the old lady, laughing. "I only meant the parallel to extend to the change of grace, not to the reason of it. I noticed that you said a longer one than usual to-day. Is it a feast of the Church, or a fast, or what?"

"It is neither one nor the other, Aunt Mildred; nor was my grace longer than ordinary. If you really wish to know, and will not mock at me for telling you, I was saying a short prayer."

"A thousand pardons, dear" (she reached out her thin, white hand, sparkling with jewels, and laid it on her companion's arm); "I hope you were praying for me, for Heaven knows I need it, nor could I have a better earthly intercessor."

The tone of the speaker had every sign of genuineness, and, curiously enough, that was the very thing in it that most displeased the other; she did not like having, as it were, a compliment paid her at the expense of her principles. Who was she that she should mediate between this woman and her Creator? Why did she not consult some authorized agent, such as Gerald

Vane, whom she called "father," though he was younger than herself.

"Ah! dear Aunt Mildred, I wish I could get you to think as I do; to be convinced of the truth. I have a book up-stairs called 'Aid to the Doubtful,' written originally in the Latin tongue, but which Mr. Vane has translated—"

"My dear Edith," interrupted Lady Earnshaw, smiling, "I am too old to mend. At my time of life I cannot think of beginning a new course of theology. Let me give you some turbot."

It was a comfort to the old lady that her niece was not forbidden fish: she seemed to be debarred from so many things for the good of her soul.

There was silence for a little, which the hostess was the first to break.

"I wonder how Dick is getting on with his young friend to-night?"

"I have been thinking of that, Aunt Mildred. Don't you think he is a little young to be dining at a club?"

"Well, he is nearly seventeen, and has left Eton, though, it is true, only a few days. He cannot be tied to one's apron-strings now he is no longer a school-boy. His friend, Mr. Greene, who is at college, asks him to dine with him. What would you have had me do?"

"The poor boy is so thoughtless, and I am afraid has so little principle—though, indeed, that is not his fault; and he has never known a mother's care."

"That is only too true. But, even supposing myself to be in his mother's place, here is an old school-fellow asks the lad to dine. Should I not be wounding his *amour propre*—a feeling that is perhaps strongest at his age—in saying 'No?' and then, perhaps," added the old lady, naïvely, "it is just possible he might have gone all the same."

"Oh, I hope not, Aunt Mildred; I trust not. He is self-willed, and, I fear, wild, but not so wicked as that."

Lady Earnshaw smiled again, and this time her smile had a touch of bitterness.

"If Dick is wicked at his age, God help him, and forgive grown men! I think you are disposed to take a microscopic view of human frailty, instead of using what from your own elevation above the follies of the world would more become you—the telescope."

"I beseech you do not talk like that. Elevation! My feet are set in mire and clay."

"Well, the soil is even worse, at all events, on which the rest of us are standing. As to Dick, if you objected to his going out, why did you not advise him to stay at home?"

"I advise him? You know that I have no authority; nay, that his father has warned the poor lad against me as though I were a serpent."

"Poor Francis! It seems so strange to me that you good people should quarrel so, even when you are of the same blood."

"It is written, Aunt Mildred," answered the other, gravely, "that for the good cause a man's foes shall be those of his own household."

"There is also the text, 'Let brotherly love continue,'" replied the elder lady, dryly. "You have eaten next to nothing, my dear, as usual. Will you not take one glass of wine?"

Sister Edith shook her head and smiled.

"You know I never drink wine, Aunt Mildred."

"Then we will go up-stairs. Duncombe, you will sit up for Master Richard to-night."

"Very good, my lady."

The deceased Lord Earnshaw, when he came home from his club, was supposed to use his own (skeleton) key.

CHAPTER II.

SISTER EDITH'S VIGIL.

THE two ladies, when they returned to the drawing-room, resumed the work in which they had been respectively engaged, albeit the younger, at least, would have scorned to call it by that name. Her real work lay among the tenants of the lanes and alleys of the town; and what she did, for the same clients, with her thread and needle was, by comparison, recreation. Perhaps the hardest task she had to do within-doors was to restrain herself from advocating her own opinions with a vehemence that, under the circumstances, would have been unbecoming: the Gallo-like indifference of her venerable relative to matters that were nearer to her than life itself was one of the crosses that Sister Edith had to bear.

"I had a letter from Francis this morning; and not a very satisfactory one," observed the elder lady, presently.

"Yes?"

This monosyllable was full of significance; it implied, first, an absence of surprise, and, secondly, a willingness, if the other pleased, to listen—but under protest; as though nothing coming from the quarter in question could possess any personal interest.

"I really do pity that poor boy having to spend his holidays, or, at least, the time before he goes to college, at Durnton Regis."

"I always did pity him, Aunt Mildred."

"Such a change as he must find it after Eton! Not a soul seems ever to come to the Tower, except Mr. Freeman."

Sister Edith uttered an ejaculation of disapproval.

"Yes; I must say there I agree with you," continued the old lady. "That man seems to have picked out, as it were, the worst part of the Christian faith, to form a religion for himself; and he's a toad-eater too, which is a very loathsome form of reptile. It is wonderful that Francis does not see it."

"He sees it, aunt, but fosters the man in spite of it," said Sister Edith, quietly. "He considers him a 'pillar' and a 'shining light.'"

"I wonder how it is that the clergy are now so puffed up," mused her ladyship. "In my young days, till a man was made a bishop no one thought anything of him, and not much even then. My lord's father, indeed, looked upon his chaplain as a sort of link between the drawing-room and the servants' hall; but that was an extreme case. Now half one's relatives are preached to death by them, and the other half daren't so much as eat or drink without permission of their clergyman—just as though they had taken degrees in physic instead of divinity."

Sister Edith did not reply; she was conscious that her aunt was referring to the fears of the

Church, and possibly even to the Rev. Gerald Vane himself, her own spiritual superior.

"Is Richard like what his father was, as a boy, Aunt Mildred?" inquired she, presently.

"Yes, though with a difference. He is not quite so handsome, but then he has a more frank expression. Even in his wildest days, your brother had rather an austere look. He took his pleasures sadly. But the clear skin and olive complexion, the bright brown eyes, the mass of hair, with that natural wave in it, are reproductions of his father's characteristics. Francis was never winning, to my mind, as this boy is, though my poor Mary—his cousin, too, which might in itself have been a barrier—thought otherwise." Here she sighed, and shook her gray head.

"I think Francis always loved his wife," said Sister Edith, gently.

"Yes, after a fashion. He was faithful to her, no doubt, and was sorry when she died. For my part, I am so wicked as to have preferred him in his unregenerate days to when he became a chosen vessel."

"I trust Dick will 'not be wild,'" said Sister Edith, softly.

"Let us hope not, but especially that he may not grow tame in his father's way. By-the-bye, Edith, there was something in your brother's letter which I must needs speak of, though I think it in bad taste and quite unnecessary. He begs his boy may not be sent to church to-morrow in your company—that you won't take him to St. Ethelburga's."

"Lest he should learn idolatry, I suppose," said Edith, bitterly.

"That is the very expression Francis used," answered Lady Earnshaw. "I don't approve of the place myself, as you are aware, but I think such a restriction ill-advised. I was obliged to mention it, however, lest you should have thought of taking him."

Edith said nothing, but her work did not progress for several minutes; her tears damped the linen and rusted the needle. She felt it very hard; for this boy, who had already given signs of waywardness and wilfulness, was as the apple of her eye to her. The love that the father had rejected almost with loathing, she had laid up, as it were, in store for the son; and it was her dearest wish to win him, first to heaven, and next to herself. She had secretly looked forward to going with him to church upon the morrow, and to praying for him, while she looked on his bright face, as a mother prays in the presence of her child. And now this was not to be.

As the clock struck ten, Lady Earnshaw, as usual, put away her tambour-frame, and lit her bed-candle with her own hands; for, notwithstanding her age, she was independent, and disliked the attentions even of a servant.

"If I might advise you, Edith," said she, as they embraced, "you will retire also. You look pale and worn; and if, as I suppose, you mean to attend matins to-morrow morning, your night will be, even as it is, a short one."

"I shall be in my own room almost as soon as you, dear aunt," returned Edith, and while she spoke she put away the square of linen on which she was engaged in a huge ottoman, the unsuspected receptacle of that sort of plain work, and followed her relative up-stairs.

Her own bedchamber was a large one imme-

diately over that of her aunt, but arranged in a very different style. In the latter there was a profusion of massive furniture, antiquated in design and oppressive as to its effect, but, on the whole, it was comfortable. The canopied bed was at least warm and soft; the arm-chairs, though ugly, were roomy and well stuffed. But Sister Edith's room was almost bare. The floor, though scrupulously clean, had no carpet save in the centre of the room, on which stood a writing-table. The bed was without curtains, and very narrow. There were but two chairs, high-backed and cane-bottomed. On the walls were a few engravings of a mediæval type, and all on sacred subjects; they had doubtless their merits from an artistic point of view, but the figures were hard, cold, and (to profane eyes) much out of the perspective, while every one portrayed looked intensely miserable. The only article of beauty, or luxury, was a huge crucifix of ivory, which stood in a sort of alcove on a ground of purple velvet, and with a cushion beneath it of the same costly material. To this object the occupant of the apartment reverently turned her eyes whenever she entered or quitted it, and always with a profound obeisance.

Altogether it was no wonder that Sister Edith's Protestant friends were wont to speak of her as "going over;" or that her brother Francis, as we have hinted, concluded she had already gone, not only to Rome, but even farther.

It seemed she had no intention for the present of retiring to rest, for after one glance to left and right through the open window—for it was still early autumn—she sat down and began to read. Every one knows how difficult it is to keep the attention fixed, even on an attractive volume, when the mind is anxious, as was now the case with Sister Edith's; yet to look at her one would have concluded she had no thought within her, independent of the occupation in which she was engaged. As a matter of fact, she was not greatly interested in the subject of her study—that very "Aid to the Doubtful" of which she had spoken so eulogistically to her aunt. It was Father Vane's own book, and so far had a strong claim on her attention, but a translation from the Latin is not generally a work of absorbing interest; and, besides, she had herself no doubts. And yet, from habit, from that principle of overcoming nature, or, at the worst, of seeming to do so, which had become her rule in life, she sat with the book before her as resolutely as though both were carved in stone. Nature, however, is difficult to expel (they failed to do it of old, says the poet, with a pitchfork, and the crozier of the bishop has no better luck) and Sister Edith's thoughts wandered, though her gaze was fixed. She was thinking of the truant boy, who had not yet returned home (her ears had never ceased to listen for his step upon the pavement), and her heart was heavy within her on his account. Young as he was, he had from a child been a source to her of deep anxiety. She had yearned to take his mother's place from the moment he had lost her, but that had been denied her (indeed, of late years his father had cut off all connection between them); yet before he went to school she had had opportunities of reading his character, which she had done, of course, after her own lights. The irreverence of the boy, as she term-

ed his naturalness, had shocked her. There now came into her mind some examples of it. He had attempted on one occasion, at the immature age of five, to carve the joint at luncheon. His father had put him quietly aside, with "The master of the house always carves, my boy."

"Who carves in heaven, papa?" he had replied.

It was a child's question, which would have provoked a smile among sensible folks. It is doing no wrong to either Mr. Francis Talbot or his sister to say that, differing as they did in almost all matters of opinion, they agreed in this, to ignore common-sense as much as possible. Even Mr. Talbot, however, perceived that his son's question had better be answered categorically, so he answered "The master."

"Then he must have a big knife," returned the child.

These remarks of Richard—for there had been many of the like kind—had given Sister Edith a great deal of pain. She saw in them a nature far too much "at ease in Zion," and subsequent events had confirmed her fears. Master Dick had shown himself something worse than irreverent with reference to sacred things, or what Sister Edith considered as such; and his father had not corrected him—in some matters he had even encouraged him—out of opposition to herself. In all things connected with his son he was lax and lenient, though stern enough in his dealings with the rest of the world.

Richard's stay for a few days at his grandmother's in Gresham Street, on his leaving Eton, had been looked forward to by Sister Edith as an opportunity for regaining her old influence over the lad; but it was doubtful whether he had not already passed beyond it. It is but just to say that she had no idea of converting him to her particular views, but only to win him from evil ways, for that he had fallen into such she was well-nigh convinced. He had been flogged at school—a punishment which, in its disgrace, she considered little inferior to being placed in the pillory; and once he had come home to the Tower in what might almost be termed "custody." His private tutor, at least, had accompanied him, bearing an intimation from the school authorities that it would be better for all parties if Master Richard Talbot were quietly withdrawn by his friends. This catastrophe had, it is true, been averted, and Eton had once more taken to her bosom her prodigal son; but the sin that had almost procured his expulsion was no less, in Sister Edith's view, than if it had borne that shameful fruit. Master Richard, being but sixteen years of age, had got drunk at that famous inn, "The Christopher," at an entertainment given to some boon-companions, and on being asked his name by a master of the college, had replied, without hesitation, "Beelzebub." And now the clock of the neighboring church was chiming midnight, and this young reprobate had not yet come home. What orgy might he not yet be partaking of? To what unimaginable depravity might he not have succumbed?

As the last solemn stroke of the hour died away, Sister Edith took up her reading-lamp, and with a glance, as usual, at the symbol of her faith, which had something of appeal this time, as well as reverence in it, she left the room and softly descended the stairs. All was silent in

the house; but from the basement, as she descended the back stairs, there came to her ear a stertorous sound as though the kitchen clock was choking. Mr. Duncombe was fast asleep in an arm-chair before the fire, and snoring as only a very plethoric person in a posture favorable to the development of that gift can snore.

"Duncombe! Duncombe! Duncombe!" ejaculated Sister Edith.

"Aw right: whast is it? Goodness me. Miss Edith, I beg your pardon."

"There is no offense, Duncombe. I came down to say you need not sit up any longer for Master Richard. I will do that myself."

"But you'll be so tired, miss. I've been used to keep awake of nights for my betters."

"No matter; you have your work to do to-morrow, and I have none. I will let Master Richard in—only you need not say anything about it."

She meant, or thought she meant, that he was to be silent about this delegation of duty to her, but he replied, to her annoyance, "Oh yes, ma'am, I quite understand. Young people will be young people, and Master Richard is forgetting how time flies, no doubt. There is no need, as you say, to make a fuss about it; and her ladyship shall never know."

Considering his slumberous condition, Mr. Duncombe had really divined the thoughts of his young mistress pretty accurately. "I am afraid, miss," added he, "you will have to sit in the dining-room, or you will not hear the bell." How Mr. Duncombe himself had arranged matters for hearing the bell when he was sound asleep, Edith did not think it necessary to inquire.

She took her lamp and book into the room indicated, and prepared to continue her vigil. Her motive for so doing was partly, as she had said, to relieve the man from his watch, for she thought it wrong that an old servant should be kept out of his bed by her nephew's dissipation, but chiefly that there should be no witness but herself of Dick's return. It was probable that it might be at some disreputable hour in the morning, and even possible that he might have taken too much to drink. However astray Sister Edith may have gone in her religious faith, the principle of self-sacrifice, on which all goodness worthy of the name is built, was strong within her; nay, her merit was even greater, for by long use of the virtue she had almost become unconscious of its exercise. She denied herself, as other people please themselves, mechanically.

A dining-room is rarely a pleasant place wherein to pass the small hours of the morning; and the dining-room in Gresham Street was especially melancholy. Its vast mahogany table, so far from being suggestive of banqueting (of which, indeed, it had been innocent for the last twenty years), seemed adapted rather for the coffin of its proprietor, while all the accessories—the dark oak panelling, the sombre curtains, and the ancestral pictures on the walls—would have suited admirably with a lying in state. But Sister Edith, who had been used to keep the watches of the night by the beds of the sick and dying, wasted no thought upon these unpleasant surroundings; and if she was impatient for her nephew's return, it was solely for his own sake. Not till she had finished her book, in-

deed, did she allow herself the luxury of thought at all; and even then not without some scruple, for she had been warned by her spiritual adviser against a tendency she had to "dream."

It was, however, but her actual past that now obtruded itself upon her. Her mind reverted to the days of her youth, when she had been her father's favorite, and, as he was wont to call her after her mother's death, and not without reason, "his right hand." At that time Francis Talbot had been a very different man from what he had since become; he was then a spendthrift and a profligate, and it had been her mission to excuse him, so far as was possible, to his outraged parent. She had not been credited even then with the exercise of any such good office. Her brother had been jealous of her influence over the old man, and had accused her not only of hypocrisy (which was to be expected), but of self-seeking—of wishing to ingratiate herself with her father at his expense. This had been terrible to her; not on account of its falsehood, but because of certain hints that had been dropped by persons who had obtained great influence over her, that a disposition in her favor of her father's wealth would be of advantage to the best interests of mankind, while its reverting to her brother's hands would be an unmitigated evil. These hints had been very skillfully wrapped up, and she had been enabled to ignore them; but they had lodged in a pigeon-hole of her mind, and gave her trouble there. Then suddenly Francis had had his "call," as he termed it—which, whencesoever it had come, had certainly carried him in a very different direction from that he had hitherto pursued. It had not, however, reconciled him to his father, who, perhaps, suspected its genuineness; while it had made those persons still more resolute against him of whose influence with Edith we have already spoken. She had been warned, and this time broadly, that it was her duty to prevent, if possible, her father's estate passing into the hands of an enemy of the Church.

Edith Talbot shrunk from harming her brother's interests: she shrunk from harming those of the Church; and she was absolutely indifferent to her own. How she would have eventually decided is doubtful, but at this critical period Mrs. Francis Talbot, who had been hitherto childless, gave birth to a son. From that moment all thoughts of enriching the Church at the expense of her brother vanished from Edith's mind. She felt that she could never deprive that innocent child of any portion of his birth-right. This confidence was, however, by no means shared by Francis. For his own part, he was dead to the world, and worldly goods were dross in his eyes; but he shuddered at the thought of the wealth of the Talbots passing into Jesuits' hands. Rather to the surprise of Algernon Talbot's friends and neighbors, it was found, when he died, that this misfortune had not taken place. By a will made many years back, he left the greater part of his property, and all his landed estate, to his son, with only a moderate provision for his daughter. This circumstance had somewhat mollified her brother's resentment against her, but he still believed in his heart that she had done her best to *win* him. *It had not been so, as we know. Her love for her father, whom she had tended through*

a miserable illness with unflinching devotion, had had no sordid taint. She was thinking of him now; picturing him in his arm-chair in the old library at the Tower, with his dogs about him, and herself reading aloud to him some record of the chase. He had had no sympathy with her in spiritual things; they were matters, indeed, on which he was disinclined to think at all. But when she thought of him, she felt, in spite of all teachings to the contrary, that there were other ways of reaching heaven beside the one that she had chosen. He had loved her, and trusted her, and died with his feeble hand in hers.

Five o'clock! How clearly the strokes fell on the silent town upon its Sabbath! In half an hour it would be time for her to go to matins. With that duty, no other, short of one of life or death, was ever permitted by her to interfere. She went up-stairs, and prepared herself to go out, though with a sinking heart. She stood in fear of two things: Richard might come home in her absence, when it would be impossible to conceal from Lady Earnshaw the hour at which he returned; and, secondly, some accident might have happened to him. It was characteristic of her, and her peculiar training, that this apprehension was, on the whole, the lesser one of the two. Had she been his mother—and her solicitude for him was almost as great as though she was—it would by this time have swallowed up all others. But death itself was, in her eyes, far less terrible than shame and sin; for she knew them both. Her path had lain among them, as the course of a pure streamlet lies under thorns, briars, and between rugged rocks. The vilest had respected her; the most brutal had not molested her. Her calling had not, indeed, been always welcomed as one of mercy and love, but it had been tacitly acknowledged to be well-meaning, and there is no doubt that her professional costume—though to many of us it seems to protest too much—had been a protection to her. With her hood thrown over her head, and draped in simple black and gray, she now descends the stairs, like a good ghost whose heart is still with the struggling world that she has left; she softly opens the door (she has a latch-key of her own to let herself in with) and steps into the empty street. She glances quickly to left and right, but no living creature is to be seen; she stands, and for an instant listens intently for a quick young footstep, but no sound breaks the silence of the Sabbath morn. Then, with a deep sigh, she hurries on through short cuts that she knows, and presently comes within hearing of a little bell that does not peal, nor toll, nor ring, but tinkles like the sheep-bell heard among the solitary hills, and marks the presence of a little fold (or, so it seems to her) of Christ's own Church. Then, suddenly, it is swallowed up by another sound, a bacchanalian song—some "strange experience of Moll and Bess"—which breaks out in a shrill, clear voice and fills the street; she turns the corner and meets the singer face to face, a handsome lad, with feverish eyes and haggard face, who has evidently kept vigil like herself, though after another fashion.

"Oh, Dick!" she cries, a volume of reproof in her sad tones.

"By jingo!" says the boy. Then, with sudden consciousness of the pain in the other's face, "I'm awfully sorry, Aunt Edie, I am indeed."

CHAPTER III.

A PICKLE.

It was scarcely possible for two persons of one race to present a greater contrast to one another than did Edith Talbot and her nephew as they stood together looking into one another's eyes, and, after the first shock of meeting, silent. The woman in her robe of charity, pale, pained, and austere reproachful; the boy in evening dress, rich with studs and watch-guard, but with an air of careless fashion seldom seen in adolescence (a period of life which is generally conscious of fine raiment), and with a smile of roguish humor, which not even the seriousness of his position could banish from his pleasant face.

"You will break my heart, Dick, and the hearts of all who love you," said Edith, slowly. "Come with me."

She would have taken his hand, but with a boy's pride he offered her his arm instead, and thus they moved on together. The bell had again made itself heard, and for the first time attracted the boy's attention.

"You are going to matins, Aunt Edie, I suppose," said he, gently.

"I am, and you are going with me. I cannot say, I do not feel equal to saying, what is in my heart about you. Perhaps in God's house," she murmured, half aside, "and by the mouth of his appointed minister, some good seed may be sown even in this neglected soil that may bear fruit. Don't speak, Dick—think; search your own soul, and pray for grace to cleanse it."

"I'm awfully sorry, Aunt Edie; I really am. I know I'm a bad lot compared to you; and if you think that matins will do me good, though I'm uncommon sleepy— But, I say, isn't this St. Ethelburga's?"

"Hush! yes." They were drawing near the church, though slowly, for Master Richard was by no means walking at the same lively pace he had used when his aunt met him, and which had seemed to keep time to his reckless song.

"But the governor wrote to me that I was not to go to St. Ethelburga's."

"That is true; I had forgotten," said Sister Edith, stopping short. "I must not make you disobey your father."

"I'll do it, you know, for your sake, Aunt Edie," observed the young gentleman, placidly, while a smile twinkled at the corners of his mouth; "I'll do anything to please you."

"It was not to please myself, Dick, that I was going to take you—alas! how far he is" (she went on unconsciously) "even from understanding what is right! There is not even the germ of good."

"I say again, Aunt Edie, I am a bad lot. But even the devil, you know, is not so bad as he's painted."

He was perfectly serious; quite unconscious of the humorous inappropriateness of his *you know* in the case of the person he was addressing. "Of course, it's late, a great deal later than I thought it was; but I have really not been doing any particular harm. I met some old Eton fellows at Greene's, and went home with them to their hotel, and we played cards—"

"Cards!" groaned Sister Edith. "You played cards, and on Sunday morning!"

"Well, we began on Saturday night. And

Sunday don't begin till one gets up, you see. If one sat up on Sunday night till past twelve, and began then, I should say that was playing on Sunday, if you like. It would be the letter versus the spirit. Now, you have been to bed, and I have not."

"I have not been to bed, Dick; I have been sitting up for you all night."

"Oh, Aunt Edie, how awfully good of you! Then you sent Duncombe to bed in order that you might let me in without grandmamma's knowing about my being so late! You are a regular trump—I mean an angel. I don't deserve to have such an aunt. What a beast I was to be saying, 'Just one more deal' (for I was the one that always wanted it), when you were waiting up for me all the while! But then, you know, I didn't know it."

"My sitting up is nothing, Dick. I would sit up for a week, not to screen you, indeed (as you imagine), from the consequences of your misconduct, but to save you from your own self."

"I am a selfish beggar, I know," observed Dick, penitently. "I am afraid I have kept you from matins, for one thing."

"Yes, the door is shut; it is now too late," she sighed, as though her words had suggested something deeper than their ordinary meaning. "We will come home at once, and you can get to bed for an hour or two."

"And you, Aunt Edie?" There was genuine tenderness in the lad's tone: it was her personal kindness that moved him most; but he had a glimmer of the spiritual solicitude that was agitating his companion upon his account. "I hope you will also get some rest. I have told you the worst about myself; I have indeed. Sitting up is what every Eton fellow does when he gets a chance; and we only played sixpenny loo."

"You were playing for money, then—gambling?"

"Well, you wouldn't have us play for nothing? That would be mere waste of time."

The naivete of this remark, as well as its Johnsonian wisdom, were utterly lost upon Sister Edith.

"You think it right, then, to win the money of your friends?"

"If I can get it, certainly. Unhappily I had no such luck, for I lost a brace of counters."

"A what?"

"A couple of sovereigns."

"And where did you get the couple of sovereigns—you who have just returned from school—to pay your debts with?"

"Well, I didn't steal them, Aunt Edie," returned the young fellow, doggedly.

"I wish to know, however, how you procured them."

"Well, really, that is Confession, and the governor is dead against it; and, besides, a fellow is not bound to criminate himself, you know: that's the law of England."

"You committed a crime, then, to get possession of this money?"

"A crime? Certainly not. I did quite right—that is, I served somebody out quite right—but then I know you wouldn't think so."

"Whether you choose to tell me or not, my poor lad," said Sister Edith, gravely, "there is Some One who knows it, whose ill opinion is more to be feared than mine. I do not press you in

this matter from any idle curiosity, believe me; but I have found, in my own case, when I have done amiss, that to confess it—though, indeed, it should be to some duly authorized person—makes the burden of sin the lighter.”

“Well, as to that, this don't weigh upon me a feather's weight,” answered Dick, frankly; “but still, you have been so awfully good to me, Aunt Edie, that, sooner than vex you, I'll tell you all about it. You see, I was ‘sent up’ to the doctor's a week or two ago—that's the head-master, you know—and though I had a lot to say about it, and it was very hard lines, he wouldn't hear a word, and swished me.”

“Swished you?”

“Yes, that's flogged me, of course; he gave me ten cuts, and I owed him one for each of them, and now I've paid him. They cost him just a guinea apiece.”

“I don't understand, Dick.”

“Well, it's this way: When one leaves Eton for good, you call upon the doctor to wish him good-bye, and you leave ten guineas lying about somewhere (but where he finds it quick enough, I'll warrant), just as you leave a pound and a shilling at the dentist's done up in white paper; it's the usual fee to the head-master, which every fellow's governor sends him, to be given at the proper time; but it's not set down, I believe, in his college expenses. When a head-master is very displeased with a boy's conduct while at the school, he returns him this ‘leaving gift’ as a mark of censure. You may imagine, however, that it takes a good deal to displease him to that extent. At all events, he showed no signs of being so mortally offended with me. I had my own feelings, on the other hand, with respect to that ‘swishing,’ and though he saw the money wrapped up very neatly in my hand, he never saw any more of it. Perhaps he thought extreme delicacy of mind caused me to put it away behind the furniture somewhere, and he has been looking for it ever since. I only wish he may get it!”

“It appears to me, sir,” said Sister Edith, severely, “that you have robbed either your father or your master.”

“That is not my view of the matter, Aunt Edith,” returned Dick, seriously; “and I have really thought about it a great deal. You see, the governor never expected to see his money again, and as for the doctor, he has had a fine imposed upon him for injustice.”

“He must have the money, sir, by to-morrow's post.”

“He shall have twenty-five bob of it, if you insist upon it, Aunt Edie; but the other eight pound fifteen is gone in—in lucifers and sundries.”

“In lucifers and sundries!” repeated Sister Edith, in astonished tones.

“Well, that is, in miscellaneous expenses: charities, and so on. At all events, it's gone.”

“What! have you spent nearly nine pounds in the two days you have been in London?”

“Yes; and I wish I had spent the rest of it, if you are thinking of paying it to the doctor.”

“I don't know what to say, or what to do with you, Dick!” cried Sister Edith, in great perplexity.

“Say nothing at all, Aunt Edie; let by-gones be by-gones; and as for doing—just let me in

with your latch-key—there's nobody stirring; and let all be forgotten and forgiven. ‘Join hands and floods of tears.’”

She opened the door, and closed it behind them softly.

“Now give me a kiss, Aunt Edie, and many, many thanks.”

But Sister Edith shook her head. The tears which he had so flippantly invoked were coursing down her pale cheeks.

“I can't kiss you, Dick, just now; my heart is too sore.”

“What a beast I am to have made it so! I really will be a better boy, Aunt Edie; at least, I'll try.”

His bold brown eyes looked very soft and dewy, and he turned his spare, olive face toward her with a beseeching smile. It was not in woman to resist an appeal at once so penitent and so tender.

Sister Edith threw her arms about him and kissed his cheek.

“Here's the five-and-twenty bob,” said he, ruefully. “You had better take it while you can, for my pockets, somehow, always seem to have a hole in them.”

“No, Dick, no!”—she put his hand aside with a gentle touch—“it is not your money that I want. You shall send the doctor a check from me to-morrow.”

“But I shall never save ten pounds to pay you, Aunt Edie; I never could save sixpence.”

“Tush, tush! what matters that? If you will only try to be a good man, Dick, that will repay me a thousand times. Now, go to bed, and get what rest you can.”

Dick ran up-stairs like a lamplighter. “She's a regular brick, is Aunt Edie, let the governor say what he likes,” was his reflection as he threw off his clothes. “I felt that soft that I was within an ace of telling her what I had done with my ticker.”

For although his watch-guard had made so fine a display outside his waistcoat, there had been, alas! no watch at the end of it.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WISDOM OF THE SERPENT.

AMONG the many good gifts of the children of light there is none that is more astounding to those of this world—when they take the trouble to note it—than their powers of physical endurance. One sees a delicate, fragile woman going out at all hours, and in the worst of weather, to carry comfort to the poor; or another sitting up night after night in attendance on the sick. Whereas the lives of worldly folks are (to themselves) so valuable that they cannot risk much conflict with the elements, while a late rubber at the club (when one is past middle-life) makes one “absolutely good for nothing” for the next day; and this is the more curious, since, as a rule, one is not much given to fasting even on Fridays, nor to impairing one's natural vigor by stripes with a knotted cord, or the wearing of hair-shirts—practices, as one is given to understand, which are indulged in by some of the godly.

In spite of Sister Edith's vigil, for example,

she appeared at the breakfast-table at the usual hour, and without any of those appearances of fatigue, which a young lady who has been kept up at a ball "till the small hours" would have been certain to exhibit. Master Richard Talbot, on the other hand, looked not only very sleepy, but slightly sheepish, for he was not sure that he was "out of the wood," as he expressed it, with respect to his delinquency of the previous night. His apprehensions were, however, unfounded.

"You did not come home very early last night, I am afraid, Master Dick," was all that his grandmother said to him by way of rebuke; and he had the grace to reply that he was sorry any one should have been kept up on his account.

Duncombe smiled, as he handed the muffins, with the air of a faithful retainer, who can forgive a good deal to a youthful scion of his mistress's house, and nothing more was said about the matter.

Her ladyship and her grandson went to church together, and the latter found the family pew so comfortable that he took a refreshing sleep during the sermon, from which he had the good-fortune, as he flattered himself, to wake at the proper moment without exciting observation. His grandmother was quite conscious of his crime; but, as she had seen him drop half a crown into the collecting plate (though, to do him justice, without the least ostentation), she deemed that act of benevolence had more than counterbalanced his weakness, and forbore to reprove him. Perhaps it should be confessed that her ladyship did not herself find sermons very attractive. The vehemence with which her niece had taken one view of religious life, and her nephew and son-in-law the other, had made her very charitable to persons that were not very earnest in either direction; and, in particular, she was not displeased that her grandson, notwithstanding his father's example, had shown his preference to "good works" over "doctrine."

Sister Edith, of course, worshipped at St. Ethelburga's, and after service did not appear at the well-furnished luncheon-table in Gresham Street. She repaired to Ford's Alley, a neighboring by-street, where her person was more familiar than her name, and indeed where only a few of the many who had good cause to welcome her knew her as Miss Talbot at all. The house she entered differed only from the rest of its humble neighbors in the fact that it had been painted at a recent date—a thing which had not happened to the others within the memory of man—and that, within, it was as clean as white-wash and soap could make it. The arrangements in-doors were somewhat peculiar. In the low room on which the door opened from the street there were arranged two narrow tables of deal, set forth as if for a substantial meal, and on the forms that ran round them were seated some thirty little children. Their faces, worn and pinched by poverty and pain, showed genuine pleasure as she came in; but they did not rise to greet her, for they were all either invalids or cripples. Perhaps not one of them had ever known what it was to have a meat dinner well cooked, except at that house of entertainment, where nothing was charged, and everything, though plain, was of the best. To be on Sister Edith's dinner-list was an honor more coveted by the juveniles of Ford's Alley than is admit-

tance to the most exclusive mansions of May-fair by the *nouveaux riches*. Those who were hale and hearty actually envied their sick fellows, whose ailments were the passports to this paradise. It was only the very little ones who were allowed to drum upon the table with their spoon and fork, at the spectacle of the huge joint when it was borne in triumph into the room, but the sparkling eyes of the rest expressed their rapture. For the moment—and for twenty minutes afterward—the crippled limb, the couch of pain, the days devoid of play, the restless nights, were all forgotten in the enjoyment of their meal. It was a pleasant sight, and yet a sad one too, when one thought of what these young lives must be to which this simple treat seemed like a foretaste of heaven. There was an elfin look about many of the little guests, as though they had grown old ere they had emerged from childhood; they had seen so much of the struggle for life among their elders, they had heard so much (for the poor have no reticence about such matters) of the burden that their existence was to others, that they had become thoughtful ere most of us have need to think, and sad without having exhausted, nay scarcely experienced, a pleasure.

Strange and weird as they might look, the person who ministered to their wants—who waited while Sister Edith carved—had an appearance still more singular, and even uncanny. In stature she was a dwarf, but the diminutiveness of her form excited no astonishment, by reason of the more striking attractions of her face; its complexion was as fair as that of a child, but the skin was a mere net-work of wrinkles, which yet did not give the appearance of extreme age; indeed, she was yet active and vigorous, as was evident from her bearing in the smoking joint and setting it on the table apparently without effort. Picture to yourself one of those portraits of young girls by some ancient master, the lines and lineaments whereof survive, but the canvas of which time has cracked in ten thousand places, and you will have an idea of the face of Susan Parkes—only the cracks in her case were beautifully clear. Her eyes were dark and lustrous, though her hair was gray; and she would have been almost pretty—though in a quaint style—but for her eyebrows, which, huge and shaggy, overhung her brows like a ridge of rank gray grass, and forbade you to forget that the creature who wore them was not as others are, but what some would even call a monstrosity. She walked, too—or, rather, waddled—like a walking doll; and altogether, one would have said, was a figure to make lively children laugh, and timid ones tremble. So far, however, was this the case with her present guests, that they held Susan Parkes in a reverence such as many of them, alas! could not pay to their own mothers, and looked upon her as an earthly giver of good, compared with whom the "fairy godmother" of fiction—wherewith those poor little souls had a very slight acquaintance—sunk into insignificance. We have been told on the best authority (*i. e.*, his own) that a certain very clever fellow, who squinted, was only one-quarter of an hour behind the handsomest of his sex in getting into the good graces of his fellow-creatures; and if beauty of form has no short a start of cleverness, it has but a little lon-

ger one of goodness, which, once having overtaken it in the affections, moves on with strides that the other can never rival. The latter, indeed, is as a cut flower, which ravishes the eye at first sight, and attracts it beyond that which is in the earth in bud; but every day it loses some charm, while every day its rival grows and blows, and when the one is stale and withered, the other is radiant and fragrant still.

"Well, Susan, how are our young people?" inquired Sister Edith, cheerfully, whose arrival appeared to be the signal for bringing in the joint, and who took up her place at once at the head of the table, standing.

Before Susan could reply, the children burst into a little hymn, which, in view of the beef, was unquestionably a psalm of thanksgiving, what doubt soever might have been engendered by its time and tune. A musical ear might very possibly have been dissatisfied with the performance, but the very quavering and incertitude of their tiny voices had a pathos of their own beyond the reach of art. It was not "a feast for the gods" that was spread on that narrow table and beneath that lowly roof, but it was a feast that the gods must surely have looked kindly on. When it was over, and certain oranges had been produced, at the appearance of which the children's eyes enlarged and glistened as though they beheld the golden fruit of the Hesperides, Sister Edith turned to her assistant, and said, "Is your sister-in-law still with you?"

"Yes, ma'am; you will find her up-stairs with Lucy."

Edith nodded, and leaving Susan to superintend the dessert (which had become a wholesale manufactory of orange "pigs"), ascended the narrow stairs, and, knocking softly at the door, entered the room above. The apartment was barely and cheaply furnished, and resembled other rooms in the same locality, save that it was scrupulously clean; yet it was not devoid of at least one article of luxury. On the table lay an open box, in which reposed, on a cushion of velvet made to fit its form, a large and very handsome flute. This made as prominent an object in the place as a huge vase or statue would have done in a more splendid apartment. A girl, half child, half woman, of remarkable beauty, was standing over it, and regarding it with much apparent admiration. Her frame was tall, and thin, and undeveloped; but the beauty of her face was, for her years (which were but seventeen), singularly mature. Her large hazel eyes had a steadfastness in them which would have marred their comeliness had it been less complete; the lines of her mouth, notwithstanding that the lips were shaped like the bow of Cupid, were resolute almost to hardness; while her jaw—the only defect in her features—was of that massive kind which in a man we associate with obstinacy. Even now, as she looked up at the entrance of the new-comer, an expression of determination, nay, even of defiance, rose into her face, which seemed to a spectator wholly uncalled for.

There was nothing in Sister Edith's mien, nor in her salutation, to suggest antagonism; indeed, her words were not spoken to the girl at all (though they had reference to her), but were addressed to her mother, a fragile and sickly-looking woman, who sat in a low chair by the window, reading.

"Why, Martha, your Lucy is grown quite a woman!"

"She is tall enough, Miss Edith, that's true," answered the person addressed, rising slowly from her seat, and dropping a courtesy as she spoke; "I'm almost afraid as she will outgrow her strength."

"And yet she looks strong and healthy," said Sister Edith, turning to the girl with a pleasant smile, which the object of her admiration did not seem, nevertheless, to take in good part. She disliked being spoken of in the third person, "as though she were a horse or a cow, instead of a human being," as she afterward expressed it. Sister Edith was famous for her judicious behavior in her dealings with the poor; but Lucy Lindon had a nature which suspected patronage in all relations with her superiors, and resented it. Mrs. Parkes, her mother, had married again, and, in so doing, had lost much of that maternal influence which would otherwise have been certainly directed to amend this disposition in her offspring.

"Well, Lucy, and how do you like London?" inquired Sister Edith, kindly.

"Well, ma'am, one doesn't see much of the bright side of it in Ford's Alley, I reckon; but from what I *have* seen, I prefer it to Durnton."

"Indeed! then I differ from you," said the other, with a half-sigh. "When I was your age I thought Durnton the pleasantest spot in the world."

"I find it dull," said Lucy, quietly.

"But you have plenty to do, I should think, in helping your mother; and the work that should be most welcome is what we do for those who are dear to us. Young girls should never feel dull."

"Well, you see, Miss Edith," interposed the elder woman, "there is really not much to be done at home, and what Lucy does is done quickly, and, I am bound to say, done well. And when the work's over, she's no great reader, though, like her aunt, she has a taste for music."

"That is a harmless taste enough. You don't play the flute, I suppose, like your Aunt Susan? It is a very unusual gift for one of your sex."

"No, ma'am, I don't play the flute," said Lucy, whose eyes were still fixed upon the instrument in question. "I don't play anything, and for a very good reason—I have got nothing to play upon."

"Lor, Lucy!" exclaimed her mother, "how can you talk like that? She's every bit as much a musician in her way as Susan. If it wasn't Sunday, you should hear her sing, Miss Edith."

Lucy's beautiful face was overspread by an expression of serene contempt, that seemed to include at once her singing talents and the utterer of these encomiums herself.

"Mother knows nothing about music," said she, "and I very little. I can just amuse myself, that's all."

"That is not your aunt Susan's view," returned Mrs. Parkes; "she says you have great gifts, if you had but a teacher."

Edith stood looking from one to the other of the speakers, with a grave face. Perhaps one of them, at least, expected that she would pursue this subject to some practical result, but if so, she was doomed to disappointment.

"Your foster-son, Master Richard, is up in London, Martha. When you next see him at

the Tower you will hardly know him; during his last half at school he has become quite a young man."

"Nay, but we *have* seen him, Miss Edith: he called here only yesterday; and a very kind and thoughtful thing it was of him to come and see me."

"Indeed! He never told me he had been here, nor was I aware that he knew you were in London."

"Well, I suppose my husband told him. You see, since he has been made keeper, Master Richard sees a good deal of him in the sporting way; and he was writing to him about the prospect of birds and that, and I suppose put in that Lucy and I were come to town for a few days. I must say for Master Richard that he has no pride about him, and never forgets his old foster-mother."

"Richard has a kind heart," said Sister Edith, with a smile that contrasted strangely with a certain air of anxiety that had suddenly come over her. "I suppose he is a general favorite at Durnton."

"That he is, ma'am, though, to be sure, his high spirits sometimes lead him a little astray."

"Is he much with your husband?" inquired Sister Edith, with sudden sharpness.

"Oh, not to *signify*, ma'am:" she laid a marked stress upon that word. "They go a-shooting together in the season, but that's wholesome work. Of course, George ain't no saint, but he's been going straight this long time, and if it were otherwise I don't see as Master Richard could larn any harm of him. George likes him too well for that, as, indeed, he has cause; it was through Master Richard that he got his place under the squire; and, then, the dear lad is so open-handed with his bacca and things. By-the-bye, Miss Edith," continued Mrs. Parkes, changing her feeble and somewhat apologetic tone for one of unwonted decision, "I have got something on my mind with regard to Master Richard. When he came here the other day he left a present behind him, and I think it right to tell you what it was; for if you have any objection to Lucy's keeping it— Bring it here, girl, and let me show it to Miss Edith."

"I can show it myself, mother," said Lucy, producing from her bosom a locket of gold, heart-shaped, and of the size of a filbert, which was hung round her neck by a silk ribbon. She did not take off the ribbon, but held out the locket in a manner that meant very clearly, "You may look as much as you please; but the thing is mine, and I mean to keep it."

Sister Edith, however, did not seem to notice this, and cast on the object in question a glance of calm indifference.

"Richard is always lavish," she said; "but if he wishes to spend his pocket-money in such a foolish fashion I cannot help it."

"Well, I did not mean the value of the gift, Miss Edith," said the elder woman, "though, indeed, it must have cost a pretty penny. I thought perhaps you might object to Lucy's wearing it."

"I object, Mrs. Parkes?" and for the first time there was an air of hauteur in Sister Edith's voice; "nay, she is your daughter, not mine. I think, indeed, that it is an unsuitable ornament for a person in her position to wear, and a very silly gift for Richard to choose for the child; but

I don't see how she could well have done otherwise than accept it."

Mrs. Parkes uttered a sigh of relief. "Lucy put back the locket in her bosom with the air of one who has half drawn his sword and replaces it in his scabbard, since there is no occasion for its use, but who would have been quite as willing to have settled the matter by cold steel."

"And how long are you going to stay in London, Martha?" inquired Sister Edith.

"Well, ma'am, I think Tuesday"—Lucy drew herself up quickly like a swan who has been stooping for a draught of water, and is disturbed by some strange sound—"or Wednesday, at farthest, will see us back again at Durnton."

"You will remember me to all old friends, Martha. I am glad to have seen you, and your daughter too." She shook hands with both of them in her grave fashion, and descended to the room below, where she found Susan alone, clearing away the remainder of the feast—which comprised one huge bone and much orange-peel.

"I hope, Miss Edith, Martha told you about that locket," said the dwarf, directly the other made her appearance.

"Oh yes, she told me."

"I am glad of that, for it comes better from her mouth than mine. In my opinion, as I told Martha, the girl ought never to have been permitted to accept it."

"Perhaps it was better not to make a fuss about it, Susan, though it was indeed a most ill-advised and injudicious gift. Enough to turn the child's head if she had been a little older."

A reply rose to the other's lips, but got no farther. She saw by Sister Edith's face that that lady understood the matter better than she chose to allow.

"Has Lucy really a talent for music, Susan?"

"She has an excellent ear for it; and, though I don't pretend to be a judge of singing, she seems to me to have a very sweet voice."

"Then if that was cultivated, she might turn out to be a good singer."

"Why, yes, miss, I think there is no doubt of that."

Sister Edith nodded, smiled pleasantly, and took her leave.

Meanwhile there had been a little talk upstairs.

"Well, Lucy, I am glad that you may keep your locket, though I don't think Miss Edith was best pleased."

"I am sorry for that, mother," answered the girl, indifferently; "but I should have kept it in any case, since it was given me for my own."

She had taken it out once more, and was regarding it with an air of tenderness that suited ill with her haughty tone. "It was very lucky, however, Lucy, that Miss Edith didn't ask to see the inside of it. Shut it up and put it away. I hear your aunt's step coming up-stairs."

If Sister Edith had opened the locket, she would have seen something more familiar than welcome—namely, the face of her nephew Richard, which he had had photographed at Eton for the very purpose of being fitted into that golden heart.

CHAPTER V.

CONFESSIONS.

It is difficult to fathom the mind of a man—not in a general way, because of its profundity—but by reason of the many streams and eddies which divert the plumb-line, and prevent its going straight to the bottom. A straw may show which way the wind blows the straw, but not which way the wind blows. And what is true of a man's mind is true, in a less degree, of the mind of a boy. We are quite sure, in the latter case (as is also only too likely in the former), that self forms the chief ingredient; but on the other hand, having forgotten our own boyhood, with its disproportionate hopes and fears, and finite pleasures, we are at fault for the springs of action. But in the case of the Adolescent, or Hobbledohoy, as he is contemptuously termed by his elders, it is scarcely necessary to use the dredging-machine. We may take it for granted that his mind is more or less fixed upon the fair sex.

It was early days, some will think, for Master Richard Talbot to have given his photograph in a heart-shaped locket to the object of his affections; but, then, youth at Eton is precocious. These two—he and “the beloved object”—had not been at school together, like the youthful Scotch lovers, and “skelped together hame” afterward, but they had learned “one lesson from the same book”—to love one another. From childhood upward Lucy had been his playmate in the summer woods about Durnton Regis, and “pu’ed the gowans fine” to pour into each other's laps; they had sought in company along the desolate shores of the Dorn for the marsh flower and the feathery rush; they had sat hand-in-hand for hours and watched the Northern Ocean beat against the sea-wall, and its awful diapason had been music to them. What did it matter, thought the neighbors, if the heir of the Tower and the child of his foster-mother found their chief pleasure in each other's society? Lucy's step-father, George Parkes, bore, it is true, a very indifferent character; but even if he did teach the lad to snare a hare or kill a pheasant on its perch without the aid of a gun, they were his father's hares and pheasants, and would be his own one day. There was no flaw to speak of in this reasoning, only the good folks who took this philosophical view of the matter overlooked the lapse of time, which brings about other changes than decay and death. Mr. Talbot the elder, whose business it was, as they justly said, to look after the lad, did not much concern himself with sublunary matters, but kept his thoughts fixed on higher things; whereas Mr. George Parkes, whose business it was to look after the girl, saw nothing objectionable in the intimacy between the two young people, and, in fact, had done his best, especially of late, to encourage it.

Lucy's mother was a well-meaning but weak woman, rather afraid of her daughter (who, in addition to an independent fortune of two hundred pounds to come to her when of age, had a very decided temper of her own), and very much afraid of her husband, whose arguments, powerful in themselves, it was whispered, were sometimes backed by the application of a broom-handle or other handy weapon of persuasion. The course of Master Richard's true love had, there-

fore, hitherto run smoothly enough, as regarded the young lady's family; but he had now received intimation of opposition on the part of his own, and from an unexpected quarter. It seemed to him a most abnormal as well as unjustifiable proceeding that “Sister Edith,” dead as she professed to be to earthly vanities, should meddle with any affair of the heart; yet this she had done in his case, and with considerable vigor.

On her return from the “children's dinner-table” on that Sunday afternoon, she had had a long private interview with her nephew, in which she had exhibited quite unlooked-for views of practical life and conduct. He had done his best to “block” everything she said, as he afterward expressed it, for he knew that scoring was out of the question, but he was, nevertheless, bowled out.

“I have found out how you spent your money, sir, since you came to London,” were her first words.

Dick's face was a picture. For a moment he looked a little anxious, like some gentleman of shady habits at a police-court, who has not yet heard the particular “charge” upon which he has been apprehended; but almost immediately he began to laugh outright.

“You must be very clever, Aunt Edie, for upon my life, I can't tell you how it has gone myself.”

“You bought a gold locket with it for Lucy Parkes.”

Thereupon was at once disproved the libellous assertion that no Eton boy in the fifth form can blush; for into Dick's olive face came a very decided tinge of color.

“I did buy her a locket; but it was not with that money,” replied he, with unwonted doggedness. It was a very foolish reply, and one which would have only occurred to a very young offender. Indeed, had he been really the gentleman in trouble of whom we have hypothetically spoken, he would have previously been put upon his guard by the law itself, and solemnly warned not to commit himself by any such impulsive statement. Poor Dick thought he had found a flaw in the indictment, instead of laying himself open to a new and equally serious charge.

“Then where did you get the first money? Did your father intrust you with any other sums than the head-master's fee, and which you similarly misappropriated?”

“It was my own money: I raised it at the pawnbroker's on my watch;” and Dick dangled his Albert guard with nothing at the end of it, to corroborate his assertion.

It was very lucky for him that Sister Edith, through her relations with her poor clients, was familiar with the pawnbroking system, and was, therefore, not so shocked at this avowal as other persons in her position would have been. Lady Earnshaw, for example, would have been horrified by such a revelation of depravity. Nevertheless, her manner was very grave and almost stern, as she replied, “Oh, you pawned the watch that your grandmother gave you on your birthday! Suppose she was to ask to see it?”

“I should not tell a lie, Aunt Edie.”

Here the accused made the first point in his own favor, and I am afraid “the court was with him” from that moment, notwithstanding its implacable demeanor. Sister Edith admired the

boy's positiveness, so different from the evasions and falsehoods she was accustomed to meet with in the youth of another class; and she did not, perhaps, take into account how generous treatment and a position of social superiority lead to truth (except in the basest characters), as naturally as poverty and dependence to lying.

"I suppose not, Richard; yet the truth would distress her almost as much as a lie. That watch must be redeemed at once."

"I'm awfully sorry, Aunt Edie; but I tore up the ticket."

"Tore up the ticket! What for?"

"Well, I'll tell you, and then you'll see that it's not worth while to get the watch out. I was running down-stairs at 'my tutor's,' and it somehow jumped out of my pocket and fell on the pavement of the hall. It never went again, except for a moment or two, unless it was laid upon its back; and so I 'popped' it for three pounds. You may wonder how I got so much money on it; but the fact is, the man had had it once or twice before the accident—and not knowing it had now only a 'horizontal movement' (as I've heard him call it), he advanced the same sum as usual, and, you see, I knew it would not be worth while to redeem it at the old price, and so I tore up the ticket."

"Richard Talbot, you are a very wicked boy!"

"I know I'm a bad lot, Aunt Edie. I was born so; father says we are all born so, till something happens—I don't quite know what it is. I only know it hasn't happened to me."

This was another point in Dick's favor. The terrible manner (as his aunt thought it) of his bringing-up, the heretical notions that had been instilled into him from his childhood, were an excuse for almost anything that was amiss in the lad. There was, nevertheless, a certain scorn in her tone (very rarely found there) as she replied, "If I were you, Richard, I would not speak of religion of any kind when confessing to have cheated a tradesman."

Then once more this incorrigible boy burst into laughter, which it must be confessed was of a genuine sort, not defiant nor cynical, but a wholesome fit of merriment produced by the very source of fun—the sense of incongruity.

"My dear aunt Edie, if you only knew old Pledge!—the downiest, wiliest, thievingest old Jew jeweller out of Newgate. He charged me for that very locket (as I have since found out, for another fellow bought one exactly like it) nearly twice its value, because he knew I had the money in my pocket, since he had just advanced it on the watch. Once—just *once*—out of a dozen transactions I have had with him, I have got this little rise out of him; and you talk of cheating. Cheating Mr. Josiah Pledge! You might just as well attempt to cheat the—why, dear me, anybody!" concluded Master Richard, in some confusion.

"Because a person such as you describe has behaved ill to you, Richard, is no reason why you should take an underhand advantage of him."

"Advantage! I wish I could think that had happened; I have no doubt that even now he has made a good bargain, though not so good as he imagined. I am sure he has, by the way in which he grinned at me the next time—that is, I mean, the next time I met him, and when, of course, he had found it out."

"So young Eton gentlemen frequent pawnbrokers' shops as other boys at other schools go to the pastry-cook's?"

"No, Aunt Edie; but some of them have a taste for jewellery, or like to buy it for their sisters." Dick had just avoided the pitfall "sweethearts," and a quick turn of the tongue landed him on this firm domestic ground. "I dare say there are very few fellows who know he is a pawnbroker; but somehow I found it out; and when one wants a little money—and I'm always wanting it, Aunt Edie—Josiah's shop is a great convenience."

"I wish to hear nothing more, Richard, of such disgraceful doings," said Sister Edith. "I will send to Windsor to-morrow and get back the watch; if it can't be made to go, you shall have another like it."

"Oh, Aunt Edie!"

She held up her hand for silence. "I don't want your thanks, Richard. If you are really grateful, show it by amendment. About one thing I have made up my mind—you will return home to-morrow. London is not a proper place for a boy who has no one to look after him, and who has no good principles to keep him straight. There shall be no gambling, nor coming home at daylight, while you are (ostensibly) under your grandmother's care."

"Let me stay till Wednesday, Aunt Edie," pleaded Dick, with downcast eyes.

"Why?"

He felt, though he did not meet her gaze, that Aunt Edie was looking him through and through.

"Well, I had promised to meet a friend, who is going to the Crystal Palace on Tuesday with a relative."

"Your friend must be content with his relative."

"Well, but suppose I don't choose to go?" said the lad. "You've been very good to me, I don't deny; but I am not a child, Aunt Edie."

"No, for you lack the innocence of childhood. If you refuse to go, I will tell your grandmother what time you came home this morning."

"Well, that is mean; for you gave me to understand you wouldn't. That's what the governor would call Jesuitical."

The color rushed into Sister Edith's face as though he had struck it with his hand.

"No, I didn't mean that, Aunt Edie!" exclaimed he, eagerly. "Of course, you could tell her about the watch; and that hole would be quite deep enough for me. Let there be 'Par' between us; that's what we say at Eton, when we make up a quarrel. I'll go home to-morrow, if you wish it; only, how are you going to explain it to the governor?"

"I will get your grandmother to do that, and, if possible, without getting you into trouble; but, of course, I must tell her *something*."

"Don't say anything about old Pledge—and the—the locket," said Dick, sheepishly.

"Of course not. There would, however, have been no harm in giving a present to your foster-mother's child if you had bought it with your own pocket-money, though the gift you chose was ridiculously unsuitable. Is this Mr. Pledge a watch-maker?"

"Yes; at least, I suppose so: he sells watches."

"Well, then, if Lady Earnshaw asks where

your watch is, you can tell her with truth that it is at the watch-maker's."

"By Jove, Aunt Edie, what a one* you are to get a fellow out of a scrape!"

"I wish I could get you out of the faults that lead to the scrapes."

So the interview had ended. Aunt Edie proved as good as her word, and contrived to explain her nephew's sudden departure to Lady Earnshaw (he called it "squaring his grandmother") without getting him into trouble with her. She even purchased for him a silver watch, as a temporary substitute for that in the custody of Mr. Pledge, and also sent a check to the head-master for the money that her young relative had omitted, by mistake, to leave behind him.

But there was one item in the arrangements which Master Richard resented extremely. He had a companion on his way to the Eastern Counties railway-station in the person of the Rev. Gerald Vane, who, happening to look in, in Gresham Street, on Monday morning on his way to that very part of the town, was offered by Sister Edith a seat in his cab. Nothing could be more natural than such a proceeding, only Dick had a shrewd suspicion that the whole plan had been designed to see him safe into the train, and on his way home. He had no very great admiration for ecclesiastics generally—in the circles at Eton in which Dick moved they were called "devil-dodgers"—and Mr. Vane was an object of his especial dislike. He didn't lay everything to heart that his father said; but when it was of a character that suited with his own ideas it had its weight, and his father had said some very severe things of "Father Vane." One of them was that he was not so solicitous to be Aunt Edie's "father" as her "husband," and that not so much in view of her spiritual gifts as of her temporal possessions. Not that Aunt Edie was rich; her father had not wronged his son, as he had at one time apprehended, by making her his heir; but he had left her an income which, in the eyes of an ascetic ecclesiastic accustomed to the root and the spring—but not, perhaps, preferring them—might seem considerable. Mr. Vane was younger than Aunt Edie—a circumstance which surely should have disarmed distrust; on the contrary, with some cynical persons it increased it. He was also understood to be vowed to celibacy, but even that did not absolve him from this injurious suspicion; it greatly confirmed it.

Mr. Gerald Vane was a well-looking young man, and, moreover, looked a gentleman. But for a slight squint, which almost always lends a sinister expression to the face, he would have been a very handsome man.* It was impossible—in his clothes, at least, to mistake him for anything but what he was—an English clergyman of the highest and driest school. He had never worn even a black cravat since the day of his ordination—nothing but the stiffest white ones; nor was a vestige of shirt-collar to be seen above it. His coat, on the other hand, was all collar, and stood up about him like the ruff of a pigeon. How he got into his waistcoat was a secret known only to himself, his tailor, and (possibly) his con-

fessor. It had no visible fastening of any kind, and looked like a bishop's silk apron worn a story higher. His hair was short and straight, and very smooth. His voice was as gentle as a woman's, and much more persuasive with the sex than any female voice. He was not, however, as we have hinted, a favorite with Lady Earnshaw, who held out to him two jewelled fingers by way of greeting. This was her least favorable form of salutation; her ordinary acquaintances got three fingers. When Richard bade her good-bye, she gave him her whole hand (with a sovereign in it), and kissed his cheek. She liked handsome lads, and not the less if they were a trifle reckless; she did not, as a rule, like clergymen, especially that section of them who attribute potency and importance to their own calling. I am afraid her venerable face wore a sly smile that was not altogether good-natured, as she saw the two gentlemen depart in company. Sister Edith did not observe this, or she would scarcely have remarked, when they had gone, "It is a great relief to me that dear Dick has left us in safe hands. I trust Mr. Vane" (she never called him "Father Vane" before her aunt) "will have the opportunity of saying a word in season before he parts from him."

"I think he had much better not."

"Oh, aunt! why not?"

"Well, I mean for his own sake. He's a very nice-spoken young man, no doubt; but Dick will eat him."

Although the prophecy was not literally accomplished, it must be confessed that Mr. Vane found Master Richard by no means conciliatory, and even slightly rude. It was quite in vain that, in a praiseworthy attempt to imitate the apostolic example of being all things to all men, the good man tried to affect the manners of a man of the world, to win the ear of his companion, and then to instil in it the words of wisdom. So far as that little device was concerned, he might just as well have put on his bands, taken out a sermon, and preached it at him. Dick had an instinctive sense of any design to improve his mind, no matter under what form it offered itself, and resented it extremely.

"Jolly place, London," observed the curate cheerfully, as they rolled through the not very "jolly" streets that formed their route to Shore-ditch. "You have had a pleasant time of it, no doubt."

"Oh, pretty well."

"Been to the theatre, and so on, I suppose?"

"No; only to the so-on—the music-hall."

This was rather startling; but perhaps, thought the curate, this disagreeable young person, who had been brought up almost as a Dissenter, might be referring to Exeter Hall, where, he believed, between the eccentric outbreaks of heterodoxy, there were lucid intervals of music.

"Music is a great interpreter of the emotions," observed Mr. Vane, thoughtfully, "and an innocent as well as wholesome recreation. You have choral service at Eton, have you not?"

"I believe you!" said Master Richard, and he laughed, as if at the recollection of some stroke of humor.

"You find nothing to laugh at in *that*, I hope!" observed the curate, with severity; for there are some things (though they are different ones) that none of us can stand.

* A comparative and superior degree of comparison, pronounced *Wonner*.

"Quite the contrary," answered Dick, coolly. "I was thinking of the fun one gets out of the choristers. You give them nuts, you know—sixpennyworth among the lot will do it—and then they can't sing a note."

"And do you think that quite fair?" inquired the curate. He spoke very quietly, but he would have liked nothing better at that moment than to have seen his young companion kneeling at the block—not, indeed, at Tower Hill, but in that chamber at Eton College which is dedicated to flagellation.

"Fair! Well, the choristers like it, and *we* like it. What would you have?"

"And the congregation?"

"Well, *we are* the congregation; so, you see, everybody's pleased."

"I don't think Sister Edith would be pleased if she heard of such proceedings."

"That is a pity," said Dick. "But I have not the pleasure of your Sister Edith's acquaintance."

The curate's smooth, pale face became scarlet.

"I was speaking of your aunt, sir."

"Oh, indeed! She is generally called Miss Talbot, except by her near relatives."

It would have been difficult, and evidently have given occasion for injurious remarks, had the curate attempted to explain to this young desperado the theory of spiritual relationship as taught by the Church; and, moreover, he was beginning to feel very uncomfortable from the fumes of an immense cigar which Master Richard had lit up. It would be improper to say that the good ecclesiastic felt angry, but he would have liked to have handed his companion over to the secular arm for summary chastisement. However, he did make one more effort at conciliation, as they passed by the refreshment-room at the station.

"Will you have a bunn, Richard?" he said.

"A bunn!" cried Dick, while all the outraged dignity of the Etonian flashed from his eyes. "I may have been rude, sir, but I am not a bear."

He threw himself into the train, and plunged into the pages of the *Sporting Life*, while the curate watched by the carriage door, like a good angel baffled. He had performed his mission so far as seeing the young gentleman safely "off," but he could scarcely be said to have done much toward his moral development. He sighed as he left the station. "If I were to tell his aunt the naked truth, I should say 'That boy will be hung.'"

The curate, on the other hand, passed from Richard's mind as soon as he lost sight of him, and was replaced by even a more attractive object—a tall and shapely figure with hazel eyes and a profusion of nut-brown hair. He could not meet her at the Crystal Palace, to which she had promised to persuade her mother to take her on the ensuing day, but on Wednesday, at latest, she would be down at Durnton. The autumn holidays were not, in general, the pleasantest, since they afforded neither shooting nor hunting; though on this occasion, as it happened, he had a certain invitation in prospect which promised amusement, since it included the society of his friend Greene; but he had never looked forward to a vacation with such pleasure. What he felt to be one of the chief charms of this first love was that it was secret. Lucy alone shared with him the knowledge of its sweet ex-

istence. Nobody guessed, nobody dreamed of it, but themselves. His foster-mother, indeed, was aware that they loved one another, but only as they had always done; and even Aunt Edie knew that he did not forget his playmate. But no one had the least suspicion of the real state of the case, or would think of putting any obstacle in the way of his happiness. He had probably—*notwithstanding* some very serious surroundings—never entertained a really serious thought in his life, prior to that which now possessed his mind—namely, to make Lucy Lindon his lawful wife at the earliest possible opportunity.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MASTER OF THE TOWER.

THERE is much talk of the different degrees of fortune among mankind; the heaped-up wealth and idleness of the few are compared (and with effect, indeed, for it is terrible) with the constant toil that is not even yet sufficient to keep poverty from the door of the many. But sharp as is the contrast, it is not greater than that which exists between the inward thoughts of men, often of the same condition and even lineage. Between my lady in the boudoir and the wench that she has scarcely set eyes on in her kitchen, there is, it is true, a great gulf fixed, but it is neither so great nor so impassable as that, perchance, which separates my lady's mind from that of her lord, or, it may be, from that of the child of her bosom.

On paramount occasions—when standing in the presence of our dead, for example—the common tie of humanity may assert itself to the very depths of us; but in ordinary life it often happens that, even with those nearest to us, we have nothing save good-will, and sometimes, alas! not even that, in common. It was not to be expected that Richard Talbot, fresh from school, and in the dawn of manhood, with his mind, as we have seen, fixed (although so naturally) upon a *misalliance* that was in the world's view impossible, could have much within him in unison with a man of fifty, a recluse, and, as was whispered, a fanatic and a visionary, albeit he were his own father; and the gulf between them was even wider than it seemed. That it was a natural one, induced by the idiosyncrasy of each, and not a breach caused by quarrel, and which could be healed by reconciliation, only made it the more insuperable. And yet there was a bond on both sides; on the one, indeed, but the instinctive filial affection which, without sympathy, is little more than a mechanical force; on the other, a strong parental love—only, unfortunately, there was small demonstration of this last. Dick could have remembered a time, had he taxed his volatile mind to do so, when his father welcomed him in the morning and dismissed him at night with a warm, nay, even a *passionate* embrace; when he would emerge from his own sombre thoughts, though not without a visible effort, to enter into his recreations; and when his childish prattle always met with an attentive ear. It seemed that this reserved and melancholy man, having so little interest in the affairs of this world, and no other object but his son to love, then lavished on him all his pent-up affections.

But a time came—Dick knew not why, nor even precisely at what date—when the current of his father's love had ceased to flow. It was visible still, but instead of the warm glow and motion it had once possessed, it was ice-bound. He listened with attention to all that was suggested for the lad's advantage, and supplied without stint everything that was required for his pleasure or comfort; but from the period in question his personal solicitude about him had sensibly diminished, and his affection was no longer demonstrated by endearments. Under any circumstances, this coldness would have worked ill in a boy of Dick's ardent disposition, but the change from hot to cold was fatal. So soon as the child perceived it, he withdrew his confidence from his parent and reposed it, when he gave it at all, in far less fitting hands. It could not be said that he was afraid of his father, for even now, when he was returning to the paternal roof before the appointed time, certainly not by reason of his good behavior, he felt but little apprehension concerning his reception; but he experienced no pleasure in the thought of home.

If Francis Talbot yearned to see his only son after three months of absence, none could tell it by his speech or look. He was the same grim, saturnine man this day—though, indeed, he did not look for Dick's return till the ensuing Wednesday—as he had been any time during the last twelve years; and, indeed, even more so, for an unexpected guest, one M. de Blaise, a young French gentleman, had just arrived at the Tower, whose presence was by no means welcome to him—for reasons.

He has sent this youngster out to "amuse himself"—which he finds very difficult—in the park and garden, and is sitting alone in his accustomed room, the library. Even on a summer day this apartment is a gloomy one, and ill-adapted for its purpose. The roof is low; its windows are small and narrow, and seem chiefly intended to demonstrate the excessive thickness of its walls; the shelves are loaded with dingy tomes of ancient date, and in some cases only with dust; for much of the literary treasures of Talbot Tower consisted of works of Catholic theology, and all these have been committed to the flames by its present proprietor. Bad as unbelief is in his eyes, it is not so bad as Popery. As to novels and stage-plays, he has never looked in any such book for these fifteen years, and Dick despises them as heartily as himself, though not on the same grounds: he has no taste for literature of any sort, but least of all for that description of it which engrosses his father. As you see Francis Talbot now, with a ponderous tome of doctrine on his knees, and his thin, keen face bending over it in rapt attention, you would say, not "Here is a student," but "Here is a fanatic." He is reading the sentence pronounced against Servetus by the Council of Geneva, at the instance of Calvin: "We now pronounce our final sentence, and condemn thee, Michael Servetus, to be fastened to a stake and burned alive, along with thy books, printed as well as written by thy hand, until thy body be reduced to ashes." "Most just, most just!" he murmurs. Then he turns the page to the account of the execution, and reads, "But the wood being perfectly green, *though the people aided the executioner in heaping fagots upon him, a long half-hour elapsed be-*

fore he ceased to show signs of life and suffering." "What is that, what is that," is the comment, "to the eternal fire?" He rises, puts down the book, and begins to pace the room. "He repented afterward and excused himself" (he is speaking of Calvin), "and there he erred, since he was only doing the Lord's will. He cut him off from hindering the Word; and what was half an hour more or less to the immeasurable sum of torment prepared for him? Who dares to say," cried he, lifting his voice and addressing an imaginary adversary, "that there is no Gehenna to me, to me, who have felt its flames these twelve years?"

His face, dark almost as a gypsy's, glowed with strange fire; his spare form rose above its ordinary height, and his eyes, keen as a hawk's, seemed to question the very heaven on which they rested. Suddenly his ear caught footsteps in the corridor without, and the cloud cleared a little from his brow, as he exclaimed, "This is kind of you, rector!"

"Kind, sir? Do not talk of kind," said the new-comer. "My time, when not employed in my Master's service, is always at yours, Talbot."

The speaker was a tall and singularly handsome man. He had a smooth forehead and speaking eyes of gray; his hair showed no trace of silver, though he was far advanced in middle-life, and he wore it long and flowing. Francis Talbot and Giles Freeman were born in the same year, but the former looked older than his contemporary by at least a decade.

"I have sent for you on a painful occasion. Charles; young De Blaise has come."

"Ah—he wants money, of course."

"Yes; and he must have it. But I will not have him here. Suppose Richard should have been at home! His coming is most unjustifiable, and contrary to our compact."

"Leave me to deal with him; I will put that straight. His claim is made void by such a proceeding, to begin with."

"No, no. There must be no threats. He shall have what he wants. But his presence is intolerable to me. He is so like—so like—"

The speaker sunk down in a chair and buried his face in his hands.

"This is worse than weakness, Talbot. What is done cannot be undone; if, indeed, you are the man that did it; and I cannot but think there is much doubt of that."

"Doubt?" echoed the other, in melancholy scorn.

"Yes; in a spiritual sense. It has been held by great divines—especially by him whose works I see you have been reading, doubtless to edification—that deeds done in the flesh, before we become regenerate, are alien and of no account; that the new man is literally a new creature. It is said that every seven years the natural body is removed, and has no parts remaining of that which first belonged to it; how much more, therefore, is it probable that the spirit, starting afresh from a vital epoch, should cast off its dross!"

Talbot groaned.

The other looked at him with searching eyes, and remained silent.

A young man sauntered by the window: he had a cane in his hand, with which he idly struck

off the heads of the roses that climbed above the terrace wall.

"That is he."

"Ay," said the rector, slowly; "a comely lad enough. How old is he?"

"Eighteen. He was the youngest. The other two are dead."

"He has the allowances of his brothers, you said, and of his mother?"

"Yes, it was so arranged."

"And yet he wants more money. It is like pouring water on a sponge."

"I know it. What matters that?"

"And he is a Papist?"

"I suppose so."

"Does that matter nothing? You are perhaps swelling the money-bags of the Scarlet Woman herself; and you should think twice before you allow any consideration, no matter how plausible it may appear to you, to contribute to an evil cause."

"This is not a question of plausibility, Freeman; it is mere right and justice."

"Ah, that is one of the most ingenious of Satan's devices. With a man like you it is no use for him to suggest fraud or misconduct: he says 'Give,' 'Be generous,' or 'Forgive,' 'Be reconciled,' but his object is the same as though he counselled the darkest deeds. He would have you serve him all the same."

"Then you really think one is justified in withholding what is due to a man, if the giving it would be harmful to religion?"

"Can there be a doubt of it, my Christian friend? Supposing as your Richard grew up he were to be a dissipated liver (which Heaven forbid!), and you had agreed to allow him a large income, which he spent in riot, would you not be justified, in spite of your agreement, in putting him upon a less allowance for the good of his own soul? The case we are considering is much more serious. It is not one of morals only, but of religion. It does not affect one soul only, but many. Therefore I say if this young man's views, being what he is, are of a virulent type, it behooves you, all compacts notwithstanding, to render him as little harmful as possible. In place of increasing your largess, check his allowance; cut his claws."

During the beginning of this speech Mr. Talbot had appeared to listen with deep attention. He had put his case of conscience to the rector as though it had a strong personal interest for him; but ere the other had finished, his sombre face wore a less earnest look, and was at last even illumined by a smile.

"Indeed, rector, this young gentleman is innocent even of the thought of spending any money he may get from me in the manner you apprehend. The Pope will never be a penny the richer by him. You shall judge of his character, however, for yourself. The more you monopolize his conversation, the better I shall be pleased. A *tête-à-tête* with the poor lad would have been intolerable to me."

"Well, I will do my best. I have snatched brands from the burning before now that have appeared even less promising than this misguided young creature."

"I do not see that you are called upon to enter into controversy with him," observed the other, dryly. "He has been brought up in the

faith of his fathers—and remember, Freeman, it is a peculiar case."

"I understand, and I respect your scruples. I shall drop a word in season; nothing more."

At that moment the strokes of the dinner-gong began to vibrate, and the two gentlemen passed through the corridor and into the hall, where they found De Blaise examining the great painted window, emblazoned with the arms of the Talbots.

"This is Charles, of whom you have heard me speak, Mr. Freeman," said the host, introducing them. "And this, my lad, is our good rector."

The two guests looked at one another with considerable interest; and each made the mental reflection that this was the first of the other's type that they had happened to meet with.

Mr. Freeman was a large, heavily built man, of florid complexion, and with that patronizing air which clergymen acquire who are "greatly thought of" by their congregations. He had been a popular preacher in London before Mr. Talbot had presented him with the living of Durnton Regis, and he was not forgetful of his former eminence.

De Blaise was of a slight figure, rather undersized, though by no means insignificant-looking: his face was wan and a little weary in its expression, as is apt to be the case with gentlemen who have had their experience of what is popularly termed "life" at an early age; but his black eyes were bright and lustrous.

He bowed politely as the rector took his hand, but did not return its somewhat unctuous pressure.

"These are fine windows," said he, in good English. "I have never seen the like of them except in cathedrals."

"Where they had much better not be," observed Mr. Freeman, gravely, "their tendency being too often idolatrous. These, on the contrary, are in their proper place. You may here read the record of a noble house from generation to generation; that is, if you have the requisite heraldic knowledge."

"Indeed! These bars and crosses signify something, then?"

"Certainly; on that pane is written, for example, that an heiress came into the family."

"Mon Dieu! You surprise me. Then this bloody hand means murder?"

"Dinner waits, gentlemen!" exclaimed Mr. Talbot, in a hoarse, impatient tone; and he himself led the way into the dining-room.

"You are mistaken, young sir," whispered the rector. "That symbol tells us that a baronetcy was conferred on one of our host's ancestors. It was lost in the Stuart troubles."

CHAPTER VII.

AN INOFPORTUNE ARRIVAL.

THE dining-room at Talbot Tower was one of the things to be seen in Suffolk, but it was scarcely adapted for purposes of conviviality. Its ceiling was a marvel of oak-carving, which you needed, however, a ladder to examine critically. Its knots and bosses had an air of insecurity for those who sat beneath them. Stern Talbots, painted in panel and of life-size, frowned down

on you from the walls; and in six corners of the room stood men in armor, with sconces in their hands, which had not an encouraging effect upon the conversationalist. This company of three persons, sitting at one end of the gigantic dining-table, might have almost given to an imaginative mind the notion of survivorship—that all the rest of the party who should have had their places there had been removed by death. And the host himself looked not unlikely to follow them.

His face, always sombre and cheerless, had from some cause become suddenly drawn and pallid, like that of a man whose hours are numbered; for some minutes he even kept an unbroken silence, and though he made a pretense of opening his lips to admit food, nothing actually passed them. His appearance and behavior were sufficient, in short, to cast a gloom over any table, and sad and severe the banquet would have been but for the vivacity of his guests. That of the rector, though it was no less effectual on that account, was forced. He had seen Mr. Talbot once, if not twice, before in almost as melancholy a condition as the present: he was accustomed to his retired and morbid ways, and it was his mission at the Tower to conceal and gloss them over to others as much as possible. De Blaise, on the other hand, was of a nature too egotistic to be depressed by another's gloom, even though it were that of his host, so long as he could find a listener to his ready tongue. He had been left to himself for the last two hours (which he had found dull companionship), and that unaccustomed abstinence from talk had made him more garrulous even than usual.

It required no finesse on the part of his companion to extract from him his position and prospects. He had just been made a lieutenant in the army, and was about to proceed with his regiment to Algeria, where things were cheap; only, unhappily, he had been lately quartered in Paris, where things were dear. It was to purchase his outfit and to pay his debts (to say truth, it was to escape arrest because of them) that he had had to apply to his dear friend and patron for a little money.

This latter piece of information was given in a low tone, though, as the rector sat between him and Mr. Talbot, and the latter was obviously deaf and blind to all that was taking place about him; the precaution was hardly necessary.

"Yet he gives you a very handsome allowance?" observed Mr. Freeman, tentatively.

"That is true; but, then, one is accustomed to live handsomely. Ten thousand francs a year are a good many francs, you may say; but what is a franc?"

"In England we think four hundred pounds a year a very tolerable addition to a young officer's income, Mr. de Blaise."

"And so it is when he has an income. Mr. Talbot is liberal in his bounty. However, I have it in his own handwriting that if I or mine were in need, we were not to scruple to apply to him for even further help. They are all gone now, except me: I ask, as it were, therefore, with four voices."

"You refer to your mother and your brothers?"

"Yes. They have gone to heaven, where they doubtless pray for our good friend here,

who deserves all their intercession." This was a statement which the rector would have felt called upon under ordinary circumstances to contest to the uttermost; but he had a purpose in view which, if less pious, was, for the moment, more pressing than theological dogma. He wished to discover how much the young man knew of the bond that united him to his host.

"Mr. Talbot must have a very great regard for you, Mr. de Blaise."

"Not that I am aware of," returned the other, naively. "Indeed, I have never seen him but once before. It is out of reverence and regard for my dear father (Heaven rest his soul!) that he is thus generous."

"That is so, is it?" The rector filled his wine-glass and looked at it critically against the light.

"They were brothers in arms, and devoted to one other."

"In the Crimea, I conclude?" put in the other with gravity, though he was well aware that his host had never held a commission.

"Yes; and what is very curious, notwithstanding all Mr. Talbot's goodness, my mother could never overcome a certain jealousy of him upon that very account. You will think it strange, but I positively never heard her mention his name."

"You must have heard others, however, speak of him."

"Never; except the lawyer through whom his money came. We were at Rouen—I was a mere child at the time—when my father died in Paris, and what would have struck me as singular, but for my subsequent knowledge of my mother's coldness toward him, Mr. Talbot never came to see us till long afterward; indeed, till after her death. He has shown himself a true friend in other ways, but even now he has forbidden me to speak of the past, so grievously does the remembrance of my father affect him."

"I know it; there is no one whose death he lamented so much. I am sure you would never wish to broach the subject to him."

"I have given my promise to that effect, sir," said the young man, stiffly, "and I hope I am a man of honor." Perhaps in his momentary indignation he raised his voice, or perhaps the sonorous sound of the last word drew Mr. Talbot's attention to his guests for the first time.

"Honor?" echoed he, in contemptuous tones. "I trust, young man, your actions are guided by higher motives than such an *ignis fatuus*. I knew one who had as high a reputation for that virtue as any man, and yet he was a seducer and an assassin."

De Blaise was about to speak, but the rector's hand pressed heavily on his arm, and he held his peace.

"What is the news in Paris, Charles?" asked Mr. Talbot presently, with an air of one who dismisses with effort an unpleasant subject.

"Oh, the Bertrand will case, sir, is still the general topic."

"A will case," answered his host, with an unexpected touch of interest; "let us hear it."

"Well, Marshal Bertrand cut his throat, you know, and, according to our law in France, was buried in his clothes. There being no will, his property went to the next heir, whereas it was known that he had intended to leave it to his

friend, Viscount Piers. He had certainly executed some deed to that effect, and was supposed to have carried it about his person. It is there still, no doubt, only it is considered an impiety with us to search or take anything out of the pockets of what you English call a *felo-de-se*."

"What superstition!" exclaimed the rector.

"Yes; but the priests in this instance are against the superstition. Bertrand's heir is a Protestant, while the viscount is an Ultramontanist, and if he got the money would, as likely as not, give half of it to the Pope. It is most amusing to see how all the Liberals are therefore in favor of respecting the ecclesiastical law."

"The law is always deserving of respect," observed Mr. Freeman, sententiously, "but more especially when it goes hand-in-hand with the public interest."

"Then you think no search should be made lest the Pope should profit by it?" said the young fellow, laughing. "That is the very argument of the heir—but, then, he hopes to profit by it."

"Young man, do not be uncharitable," put in Mr. Talbot, gravely. "These questions of conscience are not to be settled in a moment."

De Blaise gave a shrug of his shoulders. "Well, for my part, I am not a moralist. But it is my humble experience that if once one begins to think 'Is this thing right or the other?' I end by deciding on the course that best suits with my own interests."

"There is a way of escape from all temptations," observed the rector, filling himself a glass of his favorite madeira (which was poison to him), "but one must ask for counsel in the right quarter."

"Ah, you would have one consult the priest," laughed De Blaise: "there is nothing like leath-er."

"The priest! Heaven forbid! My dear young sir—" At this moment a peal from the front-door bell, which had been certainly pulled with a will, rung through the house. "Great Heaven, if it should be Richard!" exclaimed the host, starting to his feet, and looking apprehensively toward Mr. Freeman.

"It is not likely, my dear Mr. Talbot. He was not to come till to-morrow, at earliest; though I must own it was like Richard's ring."

"It is he; I hear his voice," groaned Mr. Talbot; then added, in a hurried whisper, "Take Charles away; they must never meet."

He spoke too late, however, for, ere he had finished, the door opened and admitted Master Dick himself.

"How are you, father? How d'ye do, Mr. Freeman? I did not know that you had company."

"Nay; Mr. de Blaise is not company," interposed the rector, blandly; for Mr. Talbot had only muttered a few unintelligible words of welcome. "His family has been known to your good father for many a year, and it is only right you two should be good friends."

The young gentlemen shook hands, but by no means with cordiality. Dick felt that the inconvenience of his arrival had been increased by the presence of this stranger; for how could he explain before him that he had been sent home earlier than had been agreed upon because he had proved too much for his grandmother to "manage;" moreover, he more than suspected

that this young fellow was the very one of whom he had heard certain vague rumors as having a claim upon his father, which was certainly not one to be acknowledged by his lawful son. Mr. Talbot had never so much as mentioned to him De Blaise's name, yet here the man was sitting as though the house belonged to him, while his host was manifestly distressed and ill at ease.

De Blaise, on his part, was quick to perceive these indications of disfavor, and resented them by at once affecting that air of patronage toward Dick which to a stripling is so offensive in one only a year or two his senior. "You are an Eton boy, are you not, Master Richard?"

"I have left Eton," was the lad's stiff reply, "and am going to college."

"You are going to be a clergyman, then?"

"Not if I know it," was Dick's prompt rejoinder; "that is," added he, with a sudden reflection that this reply was not complimentary to the rector, "I don't feel cut out for the pulpit. I hope to go into the army." Here he stole a glance toward his father, who was regarding him steadfastly.

"Richard is young to choose his profession just yet," observed Mr. Talbot.

"But one doesn't want Latin and Greek to be a soldier," urged De Blaise. "When I joined my regiment I knew no word of either."

"Perhaps you were not an officer," said Dick, coolly.

De Blaise's eyes flashed fire. "In France, boy, we learn our trade before we pretend to teach it to others."

"There is much to be said in favor of both systems," said the rector, gently. "I dare say, Mr. de Blaise, you smoke? While Dick has his dinner, if you would like a cigar—"

"That is what above all things I should like," cried the Frenchman, jumping up. "I shall see you again, Mr. Talbot."

"Yes—in the morning. I am an early riser, and I also retire early. Mr. Freeman will show you to your room."

They shook hands, and with a ceremonious bow to Richard, which that young gentleman returned to the soup-tureen, which had just made its appearance, De Blaise left the room with the rector.

"Now," thought Dick, "we shall have a row!"

A sign that his father had given to Mr. Freeman to take the young Frenchman away had not escaped the boy's quick eye. It was in order, he thought, to get him alone, and he was quite prepared for a jobation. But Mr. Talbot's manner, although grave, was by no means stern; and his voice was gentler than usual as he inquired of his son after Lady Earnshaw's health.

"Oh, grandmamma's all right, father. I am afraid I was a little too much for her to manage, and that's why I came home earlier. She has written this letter, to say as much."

Mr. Talbot opened the envelope without remark. "Now for the thunder-bolt!" muttered Dick, as he sipped his sherry. But his father, though he had apparently possessed himself of the contents of the epistle, said nothing, but regarded him with the same passive yet kindly expression as before. This touched the young gentleman, or, as he would himself have expressed it, "fetched" him. "I hope grand-

mamma does not complain of me very much, sir," said he, softly.

"No, there is no great harm done. It seems, at all events, you are rather a favorite of hers, in spite of your misdeeds. What were they? for she does not mention them in detail."

"Well, I sat up rather late one night."

"That's bad. Lads should go to bed betimes. You must be tired to-night after your journey, and the sooner you get your head on your pillow, the better."

"I am not tired, thank you, sir."

He had an idea in his head which he feared his father was about to nip in the bud; but he did not do so. He seemed to have forgotten what he had said last altogether, and to be once more immersed in sombre thoughts.

"Your aunt Edith was in Gresham Street, I suppose," said he, presently.

"Yes, father."

"Then that priest—what's his name?—Vane was there, too, I'll warrant."

"Well, no, sir; he only came to see me safe off the premises, as it were, and as far as the railway-station. I don't think grandmamma likes him much."

"I am glad to hear it. He is a very dangerous person."

"Well, yes; I thought him an insinuating beggar."

"He is a Jesuit in disguise," said Mr. Talbot.

"Very likely. But I must say this, father: Aunt Edith has been jolly good to me; better than I can tell you. She has behaved like a brick."

"Indeed!" The word slid from his lips like a lump of ice.

"Of course I don't pretend to know the rights and wrongs of her opinions; but I wish—I mean I think you are inclined to be a little hard upon Aunt Edie."

"She is half a Papist."

It was upon the tip of Dick's tongue to say, "And is not this Frenchman, of whom you make so much" (for he had "heard things"), "a whole one?" He had for once, however, the good sense to keep his thoughts to himself.

"That she has been very civil to you, Richard," continued the other, "I do not doubt. Perhaps you have met with something in your classical studies about *Danaos et dona ferentes*."

"She did tip me very handsomely," answered the boy, with a blush. "She is as generous as you are yourself, father."

"It is probable she wishes to make a convert of you," was the harsh reply.

"Of me, father!" Dick laughed a merry laugh. If this was so, he thought Aunt Edie must be of a sanguine temperament.

"When we think ourselves safest, my lad, we are often in the greatest danger. We cannot be too suspicious of the advances of so insidious a foe."

"Aunt Edith a foe, sir! and insidious! I can not believe it."

"Yet it is certainly true. I am speaking, of course, of her principles; against herself personally—to you, at least—I have not a word to say. Do not let us argue the matter."

Then they fell to talking about Eton and the *lad's studies and pursuits*, in which Mr. Talbot, so say truth, had never before exhibited much in-

terest. He spoke somewhat mechanically and with effort, but of that the boy was unconscious; he chattered on about his school-friends, and troubles, and pleasures, as though to a listener altogether new. He would, perhaps, have given his father all his confidence—confessed even to that financial operation performed on the head-master—but for a tinge of jealousy with respect to the young Frenchman. If it came to confession, why shouldn't the governor confess to *him*? He was quite old enough to understand such matters.

Presently the gong beat for evening prayers, and the servants came trooping in as usual.

It was Mr. Talbot's habit, after reading certain portions of Scripture, to deliver a short discourse. On this occasion he drew a picture of the life of a bad man, "known well to me in my own unregenerate days," he said, and who had died in mortal sin. Having described the hopelessness of such a man's position, he contrasted it with the future lot of the enemies of the true Church—the Papists and their congeners—and expressed his conviction that their punishment would be even more severe. Dick understood quite well to whom these latter observations pointed, and for whose benefit they were made. But he had some curiosity to know the name of the unfortunate gentleman to whom personal allusion had been made, and he expressed it.

"I was speaking of your grandfather, Lord Earnshaw," said Mr. Talbot, coldly.

"By jingo!" cried Dick, for it struck him this was going rather far—"I mean was he very bad, sir?"

"As a man he could not be worse. Yet he did less harm than many apparently good people whose principles are antagonistic to true religion. Good-night, my boy, and Heaven defend you from all evil, spiritual and temporal!"

For the first time for years, he kissed the boy, as he thus invoked on him the Divine protection.

Again Dick felt deeply moved. It was plain the governor was really fond of him, thought he, as he took up his bed-candle and moved off toward his chamber. How much better it would have been if he had made a clean breast of it about the "tenner" and the "ticker!"—the ten pounds and the watch. But he felt somehow that he couldn't do that while this Frenchman was in the house. Why had he not been made to come in to prayers like other people? He was probably, it was true, a Papist, and would have found some of the governor's remarks a little "hot;" and yet it was his father's boast that he spared no one, but delivered the truth to all men, whether in season or out of season. This fellow was enjoying a cigar all this time; why should not he (Dick) enjoy one too? He had at least as good a right as the other to the use of the smoking-room. His father, indeed, had taken it for granted that he was going to bed; but, then, neither his father nor the rector was aware that he was addicted to tobacco. This De Blaise had called him a school-boy, seeing, perhaps, that he was treated as such. It was high time that he should assert himself. He would join the rector and this stranger in the smoking-room, if they were still there, and have a cigar before he went to bed.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE SMOKING-ROOM.

THAT "youth and age cannot live together" is a statement which has been disproved by experience; but that they cannot do so harmoniously without some exceptional characteristics on one side—namely, on that of age—is very true.

The old man must be, if not young in mind, sufficiently mindful of his own youth to make allowances for the weaknesses of that period of life; not too dogmatic, and of a gentle and kindly disposition. This is far more to the purpose than mere cheerfulness. It has been well observed that the vivacity which sometimes distinguishes old age is very like folly, and there are none who recognize this more readily than the young. The great difficulty in the matter is social intercourse. The mature mind finds it not only wearisome, but often impossible, to chime in with the views of youth—which it has entertained itself at one time, and found them to be chimerical.

The Rev. Giles Freeman, Rector of Durnton Regis, an eloquent and popular theologian, had not many ideas in common with Mr. Charles de Blaise, a sublieutenant of French infantry, and national in his notions to the backbone; also, more than a quarter of a century of years yawned between them. It may have seemed, therefore, no trifling obligation under which the rector laid his friend when he took the young soldier off his shoulders that evening at the Tower, and on to his own. There were two advantages, however, to be placed in the other side of the scale. First, tobacco—magic mitigator of conversational woe; balm of all boredom; blest chloroform that fits the mind to bear all shocks, or, rather, which plucks from them their offense and jar. And, secondly, the improvement of occasion—a spiritual art on which the rector prided himself. He would not have shrunk from tackling the Pope himself, if he had found His Holiness *tête-à-tête* with him; and he had actually succeeded in publicly converting—though it was whispered not for the first time—a Jew. He had never before tried his hand on a Frenchman, because of his ignorance of the language of that benighted nation; but here was one who could speak English: young, too, and doubtless malleable as to his mind, as was Mr. Charles de Blaise, the opportunity was really a very tempting one.

Mr. Talbot did not smoke. That insignificant vice had been discarded with his larger ones when he had renounced the world and its gauds; but he had a considerable supply of cigars in stock, of the most unexceptionable brands, when this revolution took place in his opinions, and some of these were still on hand, notwithstanding the rector's occasional inroads on them. He himself was far too sagacious a theologian to despise the genial weed, which is the very begetter of thought, and inclines all men to listen to their fellow-creatures. Some of his most successful discourses of a private nature had been delivered under cover of tobacco-smoke, and, aided by its soothing influence, he had received subscriptions, both of a material and spiritual kind, from apparently quite hopeless quarters. It was thought by the sporting gentry who formed the chief

society about Durnton Regis, not, indeed, that "there could be no nonsense about the rector, since he took his cigar like a man," but that he, or rather what he said, couldn't be *all* nonsense; which, with fox-hunters, was a point gained.

Mr. Charles de Blaise was certainly not a fox-hunter, but he probably stood in far greater need of spiritual counsel than the hardest rider in Suffolk. It was bad enough to be tepid about religious matters, as most of the members of the Durnton Hunt were, and especially their principal, that once famous M.F.H. Mr. Reginald Pole; but it was worse to have embraced an erring faith.

Reasoning upon these premises, the good rector, after the puff preliminary, and a little genial talk, put a question or two to his young companion about the Established Church of his native land, and the malign influence of its priesthood. The good Irish Catholic (of the upper ranks) does not hesitate to "make hay" of his pastor; the Scotchman's store of wit would be bare indeed if you took away his jokes against "the minister;" but the Frenchman of the true Church (of whom there are a few hundred males, perhaps, still in existence) sticks by his priest, and resents alike the jeer of the infidel and the innuendo of the Protestant. The good rector was aware of this, and had got his fireman's hose in readiness in case of an outburst of pious but perverted indignation.

This precaution, however, was unnecessary, for Mr. Charles de Blaise only burst out laughing, as though that first probe had tickled him, and plunged at once into ecclesiastical tales of humor. It was not easy to astonish the Rev. Giles Freeman with stories to the discredit of the Romish clergy, but it is fair to Mr. de Blaise's talents for narrative (aided, it must be owned, by his powers of imagination), to say that he *did* astonish him. He was compelled to admit that he could not have believed that such things were, had he not heard them from the lips of his young friend with his own ears. There were little touches now and then which seemed to show the narrator himself in rather a dubious light; one, for example, in which he described himself as confessing to a priest, "for fun," a string of personal transgressions, which began in peccadilloes, but ended in such atrocities as gradually lifted the good father's hair till it stood around his tonsure, like pollards about a small round pond. The rector would certainly have felt it his duty to reprove the young man, had not the story told against confession—a practice especially distasteful to him. Upon the whole, he found his communications very interesting, and only wished he had not forgotten his note-book.

No man, however, worthy of the name—and certainly no clergyman—will "fag out" the whole evening to another man's bat, and waive his own right to an innings. The time arrived when Mr. Freeman felt that he had listened long enough, and must take his turn at the wicket. He could not conceal from himself that the ideas of his companion, though as admirable (as far as they went) as they were unexpected, had still only a negative virtue. He felt that he must be taking a good deal for granted in supposing that the young gentleman belonged to his own particular branch of the Reformed faith, or, perhaps, to any faith at all. He had a shrewd suspicion

that the dogmatic eloquence that fired his lips when in the pulpit of Durnton Regis would be out of place as respected his present audience; but he had weapons adapted for almost every description of the spiritual foe. Perhaps the strongest, and certainly the most favorite one with that army of the faithful of which he was so distinguished a leader, is the improving anecdote. When the stomach is too weak for theological argument, this pabulum is a very *Revalenta Arabica*—pleasant as to taste, wholesome as to effect, and, if one can only swallow it, easy of digestion. And it must be said to his credit that, like the immortal Dr. Sangrado, the rector believed in his own remedies. Let those whose higher faith does not stoop "to fix itself to form" say what they will, Mr. Freeman was an honest man, and if he trod what seemed to some a narrow way, he believed it to be the right one. Lady Earnshaw had called him a toady, but that hard word was by no means applicable to him. He had, it is true, that undue deference for rank and wealth which is so often found in persons of his cloth, and which is, perhaps, their most unbecoming attribute; but he was no sycophant or timeserver. If he had an eye for the loaves and fishes, he dispensed them, when he had once got them for his own, with a liberal hand. If he knocked down the infidel and the ritualist, he picked up the poor man, who was neither the one nor the other; and while his blows were wind, his help was solid. As to his relations with Mr. Talbot, which had especially aroused her ladyship's wrath, and had set even Sister Edith's gentle nature against him, it must be remembered that he had been made rector of Durnton by that gentleman, and was therefore bound to him by a strong tie of gratitude. He was his squire, and therefore he respected him; he was his co-religionist, and that turned his heart toward him more than all. There had been a time when his London congregation had shown signs of faltering on the path whereby he would have led them heavenward. He had given them too strong meat, and had persisted in administering that diet (a circumstance that did not look like love of pelf) till many had left him, and gone elsewhere for spiritual sustenance. As he lived by his pew-rents, this would have sadly straitened his pecuniary means but for the patronage of the living of Durnton Regis happening just then to fall into the hands that conferred it upon him. If the rector seemed overmindful of this good service, it did not, at least, arise from that gratitude which is the keen sense of favors to come. Mr. Talbot could do no more for him. And if he thus stood excused with reference to his social behavior, he still less needed an apology for his spiritual teaching. It was clogged, no doubt, with prejudice, and narrowed by dogma; but there was sound bottom under the mud. He could almost say of his theological discourses what our laureate says of one of his divinest melodies:

"I do but pipe because I must,
And sing but as the linnet sings."

It is not that excellent bird's fault that he rather frequently appeals to ears that have no sense of music.

Appropos of the non-necessity of the existence of priestcraft, and of the direct government of

the world, Mr. Freeman had a famous story, which had often done duty in the pulpit, called the "Four-acre Field." It had no precise date, and a variable locality, but the rector's belief in its genuineness was perfectly *bonâ fide*. A certain farmer, of infidel tenets, and with a disposition to grumble even more than customary with men of his class, had a certain field of young corn. A neighbor, wishing to be civil, observed to him that this was a very promising patch of wheat. "Yes," grunted he, "it'll do well enough. I dare say, if Providence will only let it alone." It was not a pleasant remark, and the result that followed was particularly unpleasant. Providence *did* let it alone. No sun shone on it, no shower fell on it; that promising patch of wheat withered away.

It is doubtful whether the rector himself quite recognized the enormous importance that this story must needs have, if it were really true, in the eyes of the world at large. It was to him, and to most of his congregation, merely a striking illustration of the divine influence upon human affairs, about which they entertained no doubt.

Not a trace of incredulity exhibited itself on Mr. de Blaise's face at this marvellous recital. He merely waved away the tobacco-smoke before his face, as he inquired,

"And when did this happen, my dear sir?"

"Well—it was within living memory," observed the rector, "though I cannot say exactly when."

"And where?"

Without being put at all in an offensive way, this question was disagreeable. The rector had been always accustomed to speak of the place as "in a certain county of England," and it being "certain," none of his hearers had thought it necessary to make more particular inquiries.

"I believe," said the rector, searching vaguely in his mind for some rudiments of recollection, and even, perhaps, for a wheat county which should not be in the immediate neighborhood, "I believe it was in Wiltshire."

"Then was it dark over that field when the sun shone, and dry when the rain fell everywhere else?"

"I suppose so; though, of course, I was not there."

"And you have never seen this withered field?"

"No; I have not."

"If you *had*," said De Blaise, softly, "I should not have had a word to say—the fact would have been established; but under the circumstances there is no personal discourtesy in my remarking that I don't believe that story."

"You don't believe it?"

"Not one word of it."

A smile of pity lit up the rector's features. "You are sadly sceptical, my dear sir; but I am sure that there are the elements of good in you. I am now about to relate to you an event which has come within my own personal experience, and for the facts of which I give you my personal assurance. The circumstance in question happened—Hullo, Richard!"

For here Dick had entered the room, with his bed-candle in his hand, which he at once extinguished in sign that he had not come in merely to say good-night.

"Why, we thought you had gone to bed."

"Did you? Well, I'm not, you see. I am going to have a cigar," and he took one out of the box that lay on the table.

There had been times when the rector had had considerable authority over Master Richard, but this had been exercised more and more rarely of late years; and there was that in the young gentleman's eye that warned his pastor not to attempt to exercise it now. It was very annoying that he should have come in at that interesting juncture, on the eve of a most important narration. Moreover, the rector knew that the young man's thus seeking the companionship of De Blaise would be extremely distasteful to his host; but he could not order him to his room like a school-boy. There was nothing for it but to let matters take their course. The cigar was well-flavored, and he hoped it might have such an effect upon the young gentleman as might insure his prompt retirement.

It is a mistake, however, to suppose that nothing is learned at Eton save Latin verses. Dick had smoked almost as many varieties of the weed, and as bad ones, as the Queen's Tobacco-pipe at the docks, and what he was now inhaling tasted as mild to one of his experience as mother's milk. He saw that his presence was not welcome to the rector, which of itself would at once have determined him to sit the reverend gentleman out. He thought, too, he detected an expression of amused contempt of himself and a humorous appreciation of the situation in De Blaise's face, and this stung him to the quick. He would let him know, if the occasion should demand it, which of them was in that room by right, and which by sufferance.

"You seem to have nothing to drink," observed he, ringing the bell, and speaking with the air of a host apologizing for a want of hospitality. "Beeswing" (this to the astonished butler, whose rightful name was Ramsden) "bring some gin, lemons, and nutmeg, and a kettle of boiling water. Did you ever taste gin-punch, Mr. de Blaise?"

Mr. de Blaise had tasted punch *à la Romaine*, but gin-punch, he said, was unknown to him.

"By jingo!" said Dick to himself, "I'll give it him pretty stiff."

"But, my dear Richard," said the rector, blandly, "is it not rather late? And are you sure your father would approve of having punch at this hour?"

"I am sure my father would be quite distressed," answered Dick, coolly, "that our guest should have had all this smoke without anything to drink with it. And as to the time, we sleep in the house, you know, so that that is no matter to us. A tumbler of punch, however, would do you no harm before you set out for home, and I think I can promise you it will be well brewed."

People talk of "London Assurance," but Eton assurance is also "highly commended" by the best judges. It was plain that Dick meant to have his own way, and, "If he is like this *before* the punch," groaned the rector to himself, "what will he be after it?"

He had hoped that De Blaise would have declined the offer of refreshment, but the Frenchman seemed to take the same pleasure in watching the humors of his youthful host as is experienced by the visitors in the monkey-house at the

Zoological Gardens. The materials having arrived, Dick mixed them with an artistic, but what is called in cookery a somewhat "heavy" hand, for his companions and himself.

"Good gracious!" said the rector, coughing, and with watery eyes, "you have made it very strong, my dear Richard."

"One drop of water would spoil it," returned the young gentleman, confidently. "It is made from the receipt at the 'Christopher.'"

"What is the 'Christopher?'" inquired the Frenchman.

"He is the Patron Spirit of Eton," answered Richard, solemnly — "*Floreat Etona, este perpetua*;" and he bowed his head as he had seen Aunt Edith do, and in accordance, as he supposed, with Roman Catholic ritual.

To Mr. Freeman, who was familiar with Master Richard's manner, it was evident that this was said with the object of annoying De Blaise; but the young Frenchman only bowed, as Dick did, and puffed at his cigar. He seemed good-natured, and not quick to take offense; and the two boys could scarcely do one another much harm. Mr. Talbot's objection to their coming together was, after all, but a sentimental one. And really it was high time that he (the rector) should be walking home.

From this apologetic line of argument it may be gathered that Mr. Freeman had in the background a solid reason for making his departure: he had a wife at home of whom it was rumored that she too, like her husband, had the gift of preaching, and of preaching at *him*. She obeyed the apostolic ordinance addressed to her sex of keeping silence in the church, but that was the limit of her reticence. Like the lady immortalized by Tom Hood, she "lectured in her night-gown," and this performance was regarded by the rector with little less disfavor than that of preaching in a surplice. It was probable that a homily upon late hours might be supplemented on this occasion with a few words about tarrying at the wine-cup, and some incidental reference to the seductions of tobacco. His companions knew nothing of these arguments that were appealing to him so strongly, but only perceived that he was uneasy. He "saw a form [in white raiment] they could not see, which beckoned him away; he heard a voice they could not hear, that said, 'You must not stay.'" It must be acknowledged that his position was embarrassing: on the one hand, there was his duty to his friend and patron, who, he knew, would wish him to see these young gentlemen safely bestowed for the night in their respective rooms; on the other, there was his duty to his lady and mistress. What married man will blame him for choosing the less perilous course?

"Come, Richard," said he, rising, "enough is as good as a feast; I think one glass of your punch is sufficient for any man. Suppose we go to bed."

"My dear sir," said Richard, "it would be absolutely sinful to leave so much excellent drink in the bowl. It is not the kind of punch, you see, that is good *cold*."

"Must you really go?" said De Blaise, as he shook hands. "I had hoped to have been favored with that personal experience of yours of providential interposition."

"We have experienced it ourselves," said

Dick, as the door closed behind the rector's portly form; "the parson's gone."

"So you don't like the good curé, eh, Master Richard?" said De Blaise, laughing, and sipping at his second glass.

"Nobody calls me Master Richard except the servants," observed Dick, in a white-heat of rage, and swallowing his No. 2 at a gulp; "and as to the curate, as you term him, he's a rector."

"It appears to me that you are not so accustomed to strong liquor, young gentleman, as you have represented to be the case."

"Nothing appears as it really is, my good sir," answered Dick, affably, "to a fellow who is drunk; you, for instance, probably see two of me."

"The saints forbid! One is more than sufficient for pleasure."

The sarcasm was a little too subtle for poor Dick, who was by this time busy with his third tumbler, but he understood enough of it to comprehend that he was insulted.

"If you were not under my own roof, Mr. de Blaise, I should tell you what I think of Frenchmen in general, and of you in particular."

"If I were not under your roof, boy," answered the other, with a hot spot on each of his high cheek-bones, "I would chastise you for your impertinence."

"You chastise me?"

"Yes, if it were ~~not~~ for the obligations which I am under to your father—"

"You should rather say to your mother," put in Dick, like a rapier thrust under the guard.

The Frenchman started to his feet with a face of fire. "*What*, you viper? Is it possible that you dare to imagine—"

Dick's derisive laugh cut short the sentence, and, oversetting the little table that stood between them, with its bowl and glasses, with an oath De Blaise fled at the lad's throat.

If he had succeeded in getting so far at the first dash, it would probably have gone hard with Master Richard, but that agile youth, who had studied, and by no means theoretically only, the art of self-defense, stepped aside, and, to speak scientifically, stopped him neatly with his right. This saved him, however, but for the moment; a man must be strong as well as skilful to keep a foe at bay with his fists; and the next instant the two lads were grappling with one another in a style unknown to civilized warfare, and only in estimation among wild-cats. The Frenchman was the elder and the stronger, but in France "we do not" (as I once heard a Frenchman say) "devil up" our physique except at billiards; whereas Dick's practice with the oar and the bat, and especially his experience of foot-ball scrimmages, made the conflict more equal than could have been supposed.

It was still doubtful which of these writhing, furious young creatures would have floored the other, when the door opened and each of the combatants was suddenly seized, torn asunder from the other, and held apart by an arm of iron.

"Are you drunk or mad, Charles, that you brawl at midnight beneath my roof as though it were a tavern in Belleville?" cried a stern, metallic voice; "and you, Richard, are you not ashamed to treat in this fashion a stranger and your father's guest?"

Francis Talbot was in his dressing-gown and

slippers, a garb not conducive to dramatic effect, but as he stood, firm as a rod of steel, glowering from one to the other of the flushed and breathless objects of his reproof, he looked not only the master of the situation, but of much else besides. He was no taller than the others, but he seemed to tower above them; his face, his voice, were instinct with a nature far more powerful than theirs; his eyes, always bright and fervid, had a flash of "will" in them, before which these lesser spirits cowered, abashed.

De Blaise was the first to speak. "I confess, sir, I forgot myself, when I struck your son," said he, submissively.

"He did not strike me first," said Dick, honestly enough, yet not perhaps without a touch of pride in the confession; "and it was I who gave the provocation."

"What was that?"

"A thoughtless insult," put in De Blaise, hastily. "There is no need to repeat it; the young gentleman did not know what he was saying."

The "young gentleman" was by no means prepared to endorse that statement, which was accompanied by a significant glance at the broken punch-bowl; but, on the other hand, it was impossible to attempt in his father's presence any explanation of what had recently happened.

"At all events, Richard, you little knew what you were *doing*," observed Mr. Talbot, in stern tones. His face was working with intense emotion, and his fingers, which until now had held the quondam combatants as in a vise, relaxed their grasp. "Shake hands with him, and go to your room; and ere you lay your head upon your pillow, thank Heaven for having sent me hither to prevent a grievous sin, perchance a crime."

Richard held out his hand somewhat doggedly, which the other formally took and dropped. They were a pair that would make peace with one another under compulsion, but never friends.

Dick looked toward his father, but there was to be no second farewell from him that night; he only pointed sternly to the door.

"A grievous sin," muttered the young scapegrace, as he went thoughtfully up the broad oak stairs (for recent events had sobered him), "must needs mean striking my brother. Well, *that* is no great matter, for Jones *major* and Jones *minor* had twenty rounds in 'sixpenny corner' last half, and were none the worse friends for it. And as for the 'crime,' that would have been all upon one side, for the Frenchman would have throttled me in a minute more, though I would rather die than confess it. Well, I don't wish to be hard upon the governor, but I don't think that fellow ought ever to have come here."

CHAPTER IX.

THE STAIN OF BLOOD.

WHEN Richard Talbot awoke next morning, he had but a confused consciousness of what had taken place overnight. The punch that he had brewed so strong with a view to "floor" the rector had had its effect upon his own brain: he had a general notion that he had fought a Frenchman, but no idea of the cause of quarrel. He had an indistinct recollection of having made

some insulting observation to him—probably in connection with Waterloo. His father had been angry with him for having outraged the rights of hospitality—yes—he remembered now—and upon another account. This gave him pause, and set his mind in an unwonted train of serious reflection. On the preceding evening he had been full of his own affairs, jealous of the newcomer, indignant at the fancied slights put upon his youth, wounded in his self-love and pride of place. He had felt that he had cause of complaint against his father for putting himself and this De Blaise upon an equality. Blood, it is true, was said to be thicker than water; but then it must be the legitimate fluid. What business had this son of a—well, of a Frenchwoman—in Talbot Tower, and so on? Now, his mind took a larger view. So far as he knew, this lad had never set foot in his father's house before, while he himself had been always there, its recognized heir and future head. Not a word had been breathed of De Blaise except in hints and innuendoes from base persons, and always with a sneer. If his father had corresponded with him, it had been in secret; if he had helped him, as he doubtless had, it had been by stealth and out of his abundance. He (Richard) had not been stinted to supply his rival's need. Above all, it came home to him that there had been sorrow and shame in his father's face last night, doubtless for a sin, of which he himself had already begun both to think and speak lightly, of nearly twenty years ago. He perceived dimly how heavily the recollection of it must needs weigh with a man who for all that space had almost forbore to smile from the keen sense of his own unworthiness. He even understood the humiliation that his father must have experienced at seeing De Blaise and him at the same table, especially if he had detected his son's suspicion of the relationship that existed between host and guest.

In the case of any other man of austere piety and rigid morals, Dick would doubtless have experienced a malicious satisfaction in this revelation of his frailty; but, though deficient in reverence, the lad was not without good feeling. In the case of his "governor," he felt that it was a painful circumstance, and one which it behooved him to ignore, instead of "setting his back up," as he had so foolishly done, against the interloper. It was certainly not De Blaise's fault that he had come into the world in an irregular manner; and it was a shame to grudge him a few hours of consanguineous intercourse, a good dinner (which was probably rare with any Frenchman), and a couple of cigars. It did not even strike the boy, as it would have struck some much better-principled young gentlemen, that the knowledge of this indiscretion on his father's part might stand himself in good stead when any peccadilloes of his own might be under the paternal consideration. On the contrary, he felt sorry for "the poor governor" every way, and determined, in his own behavior to De Blaise, to show that the blood between them was not bad blood. If he could not like him, he would, at least, be civil to him, and do the honors of the Tower and its surroundings in a manner that should be unmistakably friendly and without patronage.

Full of these magnanimous resolves, he descended to the breakfast-room, and finding it

without a tenant, repaired to the library, where his father was accustomed to read every morning for some hours before he held forth in prayer to the household. But that room was also empty. Dick opened a window and stepped out upon the stately terrace. A lovely view—the fairest by far to be seen from any house in Suffolk—lay open to his eyes. Beneath him lay the garden which girdled the whole edifice; beyond it, another zone, the moat, which, though it seemed to sleep, and have no other mission but to mirror the flowers and trees and one tall tower with its flag-staff, crept slowly on, as surely and unheeded as time itself. Across the moat was a small deer-park, well wooded and picturesquely knolled, and surrounded by a thick belt of trees. If this home estate was not very extensive, it contained almost every element of beauty. The master of Talbot Towers might have said to himself, "I am monarch of all I survey," without dispute—for one doesn't survey mortgages; and as to Dick, he had never even heard of such things. He regarded not without some feeling of ancestral pride, and also of future possession, the swelling upland with its spotted tenants, and the gorgeous beds of flowers whose flames the sullen stream was compelled to reflect.

He did not think of the long line of Talbots that had preceded him, who had gazed on this same scene a thousand times, and had all gone to their account; he did not dwell upon the glories of his house achieved in far back times, and, indeed, save to some students of the county history, they were somewhat vague and unintelligible; but he enjoyed that sense of inherited position which is so dear to English youths of his class, and which perhaps demands the absence of great intellectual faculties. It was possible that in the years to come he might look upon all these things as merely money's worth; and in the same spirit that caused the long-descended rake, when remonstrated with for parting with land which had been so many centuries in his family, to say, "Then it is high time it went out of it." A time might come when he might barter them for money; but to-day it seemed that nothing would part him from them. Every stone of the castle, for the stately pile had the right to be called so, every tree in the park, seemed a sort of sacred possession, and what was curious, and might have seemed to some to have boded ill for the prospects of Miss Lucy Lindon, he did not think of her in connection with them. She formed another subject of thought altogether, equally pleasing in its way, but, it must be confessed, though he never dreamed of wronging her, by no means so enduring. The only person who had a share in his present reflections was Charles de Blaise, who, though he had the Talbot blood in his veins, had no claim to any of this pleasant prospect, and whom, "poor devil," he pitied accordingly. Indeed, for a moment he pictured himself in the other's place, resenting, as he felt he would have done, the accident of birth that placed him outside the pale of position and inheritance; but a secret sense of humiliation, which was intolerable to him, forbade further reflection upon this point. Moreover, the three peacocks who were wont to strut, and scream, and flutter their stately fans upon the terrace, caught sight of him at this moment, and associating his presence, as they were wont to do, with bread-

crumbs, bore down upon him with outstretched necks. He would have returned to the breakfast-room for a roll to supply their demand, but that the sound of wheels upon what was once the drawbridge, but had for years given place to a permanent edifice of stone, attracted his attention; and, to his surprise, he saw his father driving home alone in the dog-cart.

Mr. Talbot rarely stirred beyond the limits of his own domain, and, when he did so, went in the closed carriage, which, with its well-fed steeds, rolled to the country town, greatly to the scandal of good Churchmen, only on great spiritual occasions, such as temperance lectures, evangelical addresses, and the like; it was even believed that the dog-cart was in his eyes a vessel (or vehicle) of wrath, affected by godless persons who smoked cigars and were given to horse-flesh, and scarcely to be used by Christian persons. Astonished as Dick was by the spectacle, he could not help observing how square his father sat on the high seat, and in how workmanlike a manner he handled the reins, though his face showed that he was giving no thought to the high-met-tled mare at all.

On one occasion, when he had been forbidden to leave the house on account of some boyish ailment, his father had played billiards with him, and, young as he was, he had been amazed by the brilliancy of his strokes, and the skill which had seemed to manifest itself in spite of the carelessness of its possessor. What on earth (or even beyond it) could have caused a man of such excellent gifts to despise and suffer them to fall into disuse, and to take up with dusty tomes and "bilious theology," as he had heard Lady Earnshaw term it, in their place?

Here the great bell sounded for prayers, and Richard hurried in. His father was already seated at his desk with his Bible before him, and the servants ranged in their places. De Blaise, however, was nowhere to be seen, at which he felt a slight recurrence of resentment, for that he should be excused attendance on such an occasion was favoritism indeed. Guests, it is true, were rare at Talbot Tower, but whoever did pass a night beneath its roof was expected to hear the Word read and expounded by its master before he broke his fast. Dick's eyes, which were not always on these occasions within his own control, wandered, among other places, to the breakfast-table, and observed that it was only laid for two persons; and it at once struck him that De Blaise had gone, and had probably been just taken by his father to the railway-station. This was doubtless to prevent the repetition of any disagreement between himself and the young Frenchman, such as had occurred the preceding evening—a supposition which gave him a relapse into repentance. It was shameful that his jealousy should have driven the lad thus precipitately from the shelter of the paternal roof.

Doubtless the same idea was in his father's mind, for he noticed that his discourse had reference to the avoidance of quarrels and ill-will. The tongue was a fire, and kindled (such was the preacher's homely metaphor) the grate of human passion, always ready laid, into unquenchable flame—whereat the house-maids looked at one another significantly. His father took his seat at the breakfast-table in silence, though he had not even wished his son good-morning,

which Dick set down to resentment at his conduct. He therefore resolved to take the initiative in speaking of what had occurred.

"I hope, sir, that Mr. de Blaise has not left the house in consequence of my unjustifiable behavior to him last night. I said I was sorry, as you know, but I had intended to make him a still more ample apology."

"Let us hope that the will will be taken for the deed," was the other's quiet reply. "The young man, I think, bears no malice; and, moreover, it is improbable that you and he will ever meet again."

"Indeed, sir. Then I regret all the more—upon my honor I do—that I should have treated him with such discourtesy."

Mr. Talbot rose and walked to the window. Dick noticed that he had touched no food, but only sipped his coffee. "Richard, there is a sad story about Charles de Blaise."

Dick felt himself growing very hot and uncomfortable, but said nothing, though the other seemed to await a reply.

"If you had not chanced to see him," he continued, "perhaps I should never have told you about it; but it is better as it is. The cup of shame that I have drunk so long in secret must now be emptied to the dregs."

"Indeed, sir, there is no need," observed Dick, earnestly. "If it gives you pain to tell me of any matter, it must needs give me pain to hear it."

"No need? And pain?" returned the other, with a grave amazement. "What is pain compared with sin? It should be welcome, rather than avoided, so that perchance, in mercy, some part of the punishment due to us may be remitted in the world to come. But that is impossible," he added, with despairing vehemence, and hastily pacing the room. "The lost soul is lost forever."

Dick thought this a very strong view of the case, and that it behooved him to combat it.

"A fellow can only be sorry, sir, for whatever happens, and take care not to get into the same scrape. I mean—"

"Great Heaven! what do you mean, boy?" exclaimed Mr. Talbot, vehemently. "But there, there! how should you know? how should you guess? Richard," here his voice sunk to a hollow whisper, "your father is a murderer!"

Dick started to his feet. His father a murderer! He thought it more likely that he was a madman.

"I killed Charles de Blaise's father."

"Oh, sir, impossible! or, if you did, it was in fair fight."

"What fight is fair in the sight of Heaven?" inquired the other, striking his forehead with his hand. "I sent the man, with all his sins upon his head—and they were many—to perdition, boy."

"Then it was in a duel, sir; I am sure it was in a duel," cried Richard, vaguely. "He struck you first, perhaps. No Talbot could stand a blow."

"Yes, he struck me; and for that I took his heart's blood. But before he struck me I had put an insult upon him greater than any blow."

Dick was frozen with horror. His father had dishonored the man, seduced his wife, and then slain him. According to his simple code of

morals, picked up, as a boy's morals often are, from talk and not from teaching, he conceived that it would have been the proper course to have fired in the air.

"You are hardly old enough to understand it, Richard" (Dick made a gesture to signify that he was quite mistaken there, but the other did not seem to notice it), "and yet I must needs tell you all. The burden is too great for me to bear alone: moreover, it is the will of Heaven, manifested in your meeting Charles, that you should share it. Yes, yes. It is not as if you were a priest; you are my own son, and it is right I should confess it, since the confession means humiliation, ignominy, and perhaps estrangement from my own flesh and blood."

"No, sir, not that," cried Dick, with a scarlet cheek. "I stand by you, whatever has happened or can happen."

"You speak as my own son," was the grave rejoinder, "and, therefore, like a child of this world. Listen, Richard. I am a sinful man, and in my youth I was a profligate and a cast-away. There was no law so sacred that I did not outrage it; no vice so vile but that I stooped to indulge in it; for all which some have thanked Heaven which showed them a way out of the darkness and made them saints, that so much the more might the power of grace be magnified." The hands of the speaker were clasped rigidly together: his face was turned upward with a look of steadfast yearning as though he was demanding, he regarded his own case, the secret of the world to come from heaven itself.

"Among other things—much worse—I was a gambler. At that time there was more public gaming in Paris than in London, and I often went there for that purpose. At one house, where military men were chiefly wont to meet, I lost one night a thousand pounds. I was out of temper, and imagined that I was being cheated. My suspicions rested on a silent and sombre personage—an officer of hussars—who was always at the table, staking small sums. His clothes were shabby, and he wore his coat buttoned up high in an unusual manner. I was the dealer, and missed a card; the man's hand was thrust into his breast, and it suddenly struck me that he had taken it. I taxed him with it on the instant, and he changed color.

"'You lie!' he said, and spoke truth; but I was better known in that wild company than he, and they believed me.

"'Search him, search him!' was the cry; but he said, 'No; I will not be searched!'

"'Then you confess yourself a cheat,' cried I. And then he struck me. I challenged him, of course, upon the spot. It all happened quicker than I tell it."

Dick uttered a sigh of relief. After all, it had been but a common duel, then, and there had been no help for it; he answered something to that effect.

"Common? No, it was not common. The man was wild with rage; and as I was the challenger he had the choice of how we were to kill each other. 'I will shoot that villain,' he cried, 'across a table.' This plan was objected to by my second, but for the honor of my country I thought it shameful to seem afraid. That is the world's way: a man will shrink from no ordeal in order to keep the good opinion of his fellows;

but he counts as nothing that of the God who made him."

"Then did you fire at one another, sir, across a table?"

"Yes; only the seconds decided that there should be no double murder: one of the pistols was to be loaded and one not, and we were to draw lots for choice. The weapons were in the house, and the thing took place at once, in a billiard-room that stood in the court-yard. De Blaise, for that was his name—I see him now, a pale, care-worn man, with hollow eyes that looked like coals of fire—had the first choice. As he took up the pistol his face lit up with joy. He flattered himself, from its weight, that he had made the lucky choice, that he had won the privilege of sending a fellow-creature to his long account."

"And you, father?"

"I was still blind with passion. If I thought of anything, it was upon my losses; for in those days I feared neither God nor man. That is the one advantage—a short-lived one—that the infidel possesses. He does not fear to die. He deems it is to sleep forever. Well were it for him if it could be so! We fired together, and my antagonist fell. 'The card is in his bosom,' cried I, whom even death itself had not made placable. But it was not there. It was found afterward on the floor of the gaming-room, and nowhere near where De Blaise had stood. But when the doctor had stripped him to stanch the wound, he found why the poor wretch had refused to permit himself to be searched. He had pawned his very shirt to gratify his passion for the gaming-table, and would not exhibit his poverty by disclosing that fact. 'My wife—my children!' were his last words. He had ruined them, but they were still dear to him; and I—yes, I, who stand before you—I had murdered the husband and the father."

Dick was agast with horror: the *dénouement* of the catastrophe had been altogether unexpected by him; his sense of justice, which, notwithstanding some modifications, was very strong in him, was outraged.

"It was most sad, and most unfortunate," he murmured.

"For him, but not for me," was the strange reply. "From that moment I became a new man: my eyes were opened; I saw myself as I really was, and, thanks be to Heaven! I was saved through another's loss."

To this the boy answered nothing; he knew what his father meant. He had heard him speak, before then, of the day of regeneration that had dawned upon him suddenly as a meteor-flash; but he could not bring himself *en rapport* with such views.

"You provided, however, for the widow and the orphan, sir?"

"Of course. The affair was hushed up, and I had hoped that it would never have been revealed to her by whose hand her husband fell; she knew it, however, though her children never did, and though for their sake she took my gold, she would never see my face. She died loathing the hand that fed her; they are all dead but Charles. He is ignorant of the bond of blood that unites me to him, and I hope, in Heaven's mercy, will remain so. Nevertheless, when I am gone, boy, see it is not sundered."

"He shall be as my own brother," said Dick, solemnly.

"There is no need for that, Richard. There would be danger in such intimacy: he belongs to a false faith. Let his allowance be continued—neither more nor less. It is sufficient for his needs—more by far than under other circumstances he could have hoped to possess. And now, my son," he added, regarding the boy with a look of earnest inquiry, "you know the worst."

"What you have said, sir, is very sad," said Richard, gravely. "Still, when the worst was done, you did your best to remedy it. It seems to me if one is sorry for what one does amiss, and makes amends as far as one can, and if one acts honorably—"

"That is a perilous word, boy," broke in the other, sternly. "The man who stands before you was a man of honor once himself."

"Father," put in Richard, stepping forward with an unwonted impulse, and clasping the other's hand, "your past with me, let it be what it may, can never outweigh your present. At all events, it is not for me to condemn you, and I will not."

"How strange! how sweet!" murmured the other, stroking the lad's hair with his thin fingers. "How beguiling is the touch of nature! What are you thinking of, my son?"

"I am wondering, sir, whether you have made a confidant of others in connection with this sad subject."

"With one other in England, yes: my lawyer has his instructions only concerning Charles's allowance, but Mr. Freeman, he knows why it is paid."

"I am sorry, sir," said Richard, softly. "I would have wished that you had told no one else but me."

"I had to wait, you see," said his father, gently; "and in the mean time the burden was too heavy to be borne alone. Perhaps even now, if Charles had not come over, I should have kept my secret from you."

Dick was by nature kind and affectionate, but his character had up to this period been wholly without ballast. For the first time in his life he now felt something weighty pulling at his very heart-strings: he was like a vessel, light and wind-tossed, out of which the anchor has been thrown, and holds.

"I hope, sir," said he, modestly, "to prove myself for the future worthy of your confidence."

"That is well said," answered his father, thoughtfully, and with an earnest gaze. "You will be worthy, no doubt, Richard—that is, in the sense you mean it; but confidence requires something else besides mutual affection; there must be sympathy."

"I will endeavor to feel that, too, sir," answered the lad, in a pained voice, the distress of which the other seemed to comprehend; for once again he passed his hand over the boy's head caressingly. "I cannot think, perhaps, exactly as you think, father, about religious matters; it would have been impossible for yourself to have done so at my age; but as regards the affairs of this world, surely a loving heart, and one which desires to act honestly—"

"Even for that there must be knowledge," *put in the other quickly, and in reproving tones.*

"Surely not, father; we all know right from

wrong, however we may attempt to deceive ourselves."

"You are young, Richard," answered the other, with irritation, "or you would not talk so. The Jesuit does not know right from wrong, or rather such terms are not to be found in his vocabulary. He says this is good, and this is bad, meaning for his Church, which is the abomination of desolation. I have letters to write this morning, my lad, which will need all my attention, and my mind is shaken and ill at ease."

And with a deep sigh Mr. Talbot abruptly left the room, and betook himself to the library.

Richard looked after him with an astounded air.

Momentous as his father's revelation had been, the interview left in the boy's mind a sense of incompleteness and even dissatisfaction. There had been a moment, or so he thought, when he and his father had been about to come, if not to a mutual understanding of one another (which was perhaps impossible), at least into very intimate relations. Dick had even had it on his tongue, in return for his father's confidence, to avow his passion for Lucy Lindon. That attachment might be unwise and injudicious (he had an impression that such would be the opinion of the world), but, after all, it was a mere bagatelle compared with gambling and the duello. The occasion had therefore seemed a favorable one for his confession; but there had suddenly come that change over his father's manner, that return to his old reticence, which had immediately reacted upon the lad's feelings, and the opportunity had passed away. He pitied his father from the bottom of his heart; he felt that there was cause enough for his reserve and gloom, for which, for the future, he would take care to make allowance; nor did he respect him less on account of the crime of which he had accused himself; but, on the other hand, he had been drawn no nearer to him in the way of sympathy. His father had spoken truth when he had said that something else than mere mutual affection was required for this. Young as he was, Richard had had experience of the fact himself; and though he did not recognize its existence in so direct and logical a form, he could have given a practical illustration of it. He knew, for example, that his heart leaped up with a joy as sympathetic as intense at the thought of seeing Lucy Lindon on the morrow.

CHAPTER X.

THE KEEP AT DURNTON.

MR. RICHARD TALBOT, like most young gentlemen of his class, was not addicted to poetry: he had read, it is true, Euripides, Æschylus, and Homer, as well as Horace and Virgil; but he knew about as much of their poetical merits as a monkey on a barrel-organ knows of the charms of music. He had been obliged to "grind" at them, as he called it, but the effect produced upon his mind by their beauties had been absolutely *nil*. He could scan their verses, and give to each measure its appropriate name, and there was an end of the advantage of his classical studies. If he had been set to work at any English poet it is probable he would not have made

each more of that, though if poetry is to be taught at all, one would imagine that should have been the way to it; and yet a whole stanza the "In Memoriam" (which he had never read) is now running through his mind as he walks through the long elm avenue that joins a Tower to the village:

"I wake, I rise, from end to end
Of all the landscape underneath
I find no place that does not breathe
A gracious memory of my friend."

Such was literally the case with Dick, except that for "friend" one must use a tenderer title. There was not a spot in all the parish that did not remind him of his sweetheart. Of late his affection for her had assumed another form from that it had worn when, as children, they had aimed together the level flats of Durnton; but those dear memories of childhood gave his later life an added charm. He remembered as though it were yesterday the first time that they had seen a heron in the marshes, a weasel in the woods. He recalled that adventurous night, as had seemed to them, when they had gone forth to see the Pharos at the corner of "the spit," as the thin reach of sand was called, lit up by its new light. He had heard his father and the rector speak of it as something marvelous; and Lucy had "heard tell" of it till her vivid mind had pictured to itself a scene equivalent to that of Vesuvius in eruption. The hour in which they then retired to rest in their respective dwellings had precluded them from the enjoyment of this spectacle; but the chivalrous Dick had volunteered his escort; and on one winter's night he escaped from domestic surveillance, and made a clandestine visit to "the spinny," as the cottage where she dwelt was called, in the little wood that environed it. He remembered how his heart had beaten (not with love alone) as he passed through the hazel copse, and by the weird forms of the pollard elms that fringed the brook; how he had thrown the pebbles against Lucy's lattice, and waited with chattering teeth till the latch softly clicked and she appeared in hood and cloak, trembling from head to foot with eagerness for the adventure. As fears had vanished then (for was it not his mission to protect her?), and they had hurried down to the little quay.

In front ran the river; beyond, and parallel to the long spit of sand on which the light-house stood on the edge of the sea. The river, viewed from this spot on a summer day, was very striking, and the only one in the neighborhood, save that from the Tower terrace, that could be called picturesque. You saw the river craft, most boats and barges, dropping down with the ebb, and then, above the spit, the masts and sails of the ships at sea. "The flying cloud, the misty night," imparted to this strange landscape somewhat spectral appearance, which the sense of wrong-doing no doubt exaggerated. Worst of all, what they had come at such risk of discovery to behold was not to be seen; the light-house was in its place as usual; but the great stern that formed its head, so far from being lazily with light, as they had been led to expect, lay without a glimmer.

The children, hand-in-hand, looked at one another in *hushed surprise*.

"I can row—a little," said Dick, "and here is your father's boat, the *Nancy*."

"You mean my step-father's," said Lucy, haughtily; for, young as she was, she knew that her mother had married beneath her in taking "Handsome Georgie" for her second husband.

"Let us go across."

"You are not afraid, then?" said Dick, admiringly. The tide, as it happened, was upon the turn, and the stream less swift than usual; but the Dorn was at no time a placid river. The boy had never been trusted to his own devices upon its smiling eddies yet, far less with the charge of another's safety.

"I am never afraid when you are with me, Dick," was the girl's reply. If she had offered him a million of money, he would not have deemed it so high an incentive to enterprise. To jump into Mr. Parke's boat after he had seen Lucy bestowed in it, to unhitch its chain, and to push out into the river, was an easy task for the active lad; and easier still to glide down the stream toward the sea, for the wind was with them. But to manage the huge oars was not so easy. The effect of Dick's weak and unskilful stroke upon the movement of the boat was slight indeed, and not always in the desired direction. In fact, they had already missed the landing-place for the light-house, and were drifting out to sea. Lucy perceived his difficulty and their common danger, and rising lightly from her post of honor at the stern, took her seat beside the lad.

"I can pull, *too*," said she, implying a compliment to his management of the oars that was scarcely deserved. There was plenty of room on the bench for both their little bodies, and they did their work with a will; but "wisdom," as we are justly told, "is necessary to direct." They would undoubtedly have been carried out into the channel, and there drowned or frozen, had it not been for a consummate want of adroitness upon the part of Master Richard. At the very extremity of the spit projected a little rocky inlet, much avoided by mariners. As they were hurried by it, he "caught a crab," and fell backward into the boat, the head of which, answering to Lucy's stroke, turned sharply into the very cove with a shock that swamped in the *Nancy's* timbers, but saved her occupants.

They scrambled, bruised and shaken, up the inhospitable shore just in time to see their gallant bark descend into about three feet of water.

"By jingo," cried Dick, "that was a narrow shave! Aren't your legs wet just?—mine are."

"That's nothing," said Lucy. "What will step-father say when he comes to see his boat?"

"It is my governor that will have to pay for it," said Dick, who was a little irritated, as men of all ages will be when they bark their shins. "Don't you fret. Only how are we to get back again?"

"Well, at all events," said Lucy the indomitable, "we are on the right side—for the light-house."

Dick regarded her with admiration. It is inconsistent with politeness to apply to a young lady the term of devil-may-care, nor indeed would it have so well fitted her character as that of her male companion; but she was certainly of a very resolute spirit. To the light-house, over the rough pebbles and wind-swept beach, they ac-

cordingly made their way. It was as dark as the night itself, and gave no sign of occupation, far less of illumination. Dick ran up the high steps that kept the entrance out of harm's way in flood-time, and thundered at the door. The keeper appeared with a look of much astonishment, and inquired of the child his name and business.

"I am Richard Talbot, of Talbot Tower, and I wish to see the new revolving light."

"And the other one—who's she?" inquired the man, who was a good-natured, humorous fellow.

"She is a young lady un—under my protection," explained Dick, thinking justly that the disclosure of her relationship to Mr. George Parkes would not forward his views with any constituted authority.

"Well, you must get an order from the Trinity House to admit two before you can see our light."

"That's a lie," cried Dick; "other people have seen it without orders. You had better show it us, my man."

"And suppose I don't, what then?"

"Well, I shall shy stones at the lantern till I see it lit up."

To this ultimatum the garrison surrendered with smothered mirth.

"You may come in, young master; but the place to see our light is out at sea—it don't show inland; so you might have spent all night in battering on us, and nothing would have come of it."

Never since the days of the Lion Heart did an adventure so chivalrously undertaken have so ineffectual a result.

However, they were shown the wicks and the reflectors.

"And is it possible," asked the genius of the lamp, "that you two young people have come all the way round by Swanborough at this hour o' night?" For though as the crow flies Durnton was close to the light-house, it was fifteen miles or so by the bridge and the road.

"No," said Dick, "we rowed across the river."

"You—you rowed? What, all by yourselves? Why, where's your boat?"

"Sunk," said Dick, indifferently. "We sunk her as we landed." This as though he had done it on purpose, and in the tone of a smart naval officer describing a cutting-out expedition.

"And whose boat was it as you sunk?"

"Oh, it was Lucy's—that is, George Parke's boat, the *Nancy*."

"And how do you mean to get back again?"

That was beyond Dick's power to guess; for, to say the truth, he had begun to distrust his own skill as an oarsman, even if the boat belonging to the light-house should be placed at their disposal; but Lucy, with her fine, pleading eyes, came to the rescue.

"Well, we made sure that you would put us across."

"Oh, did you?" said the man, with a good-natured grin. "Well, then, of course I must. Mate," he hallooed to his fellow somewhere up the spiral stair, "I have got a little job in hand. I'll be back in half an hour."

The little man and little maid reached home, therefore, without further catastrophe; but the adventure was long talked about in the village,

and always used to illustrate the indomitable force of Master Richard's character. The boy only remembered it now (though it was fated to recur to him afterward with a more special significance) in common with the other associations of the place with Lucy. Indeed, there was one locality that at the present moment occupied a far larger share in his recollections than the light-house. This was the tall and tottering ruin—relic of some castle, compared with which his own home was but of yesterday—called "The Keep," which stood on a rising ground above the village. Little was left of it save the vast hollow shell, the roof of which the storms of recent winters had so grievously shattered that not even the cattle now repaired thither, as of old, for casual shelter. Still, even to the present time, there was a winding stair that led to the upper chambers, one of which still boasted of a covering, though of nothing else. The walls were crumbling, the floor had huge gaps in it, and the tall and narrow casements had neither glass nor shutter. Yet to this spot Master Richard now repaired, in somewhat the same spirit—or with as much of it as was possible to him—as that with which the pilgrim seeks his shrine.

His mind was not likely to be distracted by the presence of other worshippers. The place had grown so dangerous that it was forbidden to the children of the village, with whom for generations it had been a favorite haunt; nothing but the summer breeze wandered over the decaying pile, or stirred the grasses that grew in its clefts and hollows. From the top floor could be seen a panorama of the surrounding country, which, save for the oasis formed by Talbot Tower and Park, and in a less degree by the spinney in which Lucy's cottage was situated, was flat, treeless, and uninteresting. On one side, indeed, there was the eternal glory of the sea; but even that was marred by the intervening marsh-land and the yeasty river, which was fighting between its muddy banks with the incoming tide. To Dick, however, no spot on the earth's surface had so poetic a charm; for in this room he had given his Lucy the first kiss of love.

Of course they had kissed one another as children. But when they had met on his return from Eton, one vacation, this pleasant little ceremony had somehow been omitted by tacit consent. And then again—after some interval—as they had stood one day at that old window together, looking in silence out on sea and sky, it had been renewed in a more tender fashion. Never afterward, when occasion served, was it again intermitted; but the memory of that first kiss abode with Dick, and kept its sweetness. He was thinking of it now as he stood alone in that ruined chamber, though not to the exclusion of another thought. Lucy would be home on the morrow by five at latest, and he would stroll down to the village and drop in at the spinney to ask after his foster-mother, as it was only right and proper he should do. Even if she was within, there was kitchen as well as parlor in the cottage, where one could say, "How are you?" to a body in private; and even if she was not in (and somebody else was), that disappointment would be supportable. Indeed, though of a yielding nature and fond of Master Richard, as was natural considering the relation between them, Mrs. Parkes was by no means so disposed to

throw the young people together as was her husband.

At the very moment that Dick was forecasting the future in this pleasant manner, he saw a tall, stalwart figure emerge from the little wood and make for the village. He knew him at once for George Parkes, because of that slouch in the shoulders, which had cost George so dear in the days when he had been a breaker, instead of an administrator, of the game-laws. ("I could have sworn to him among a thousand, your worship," was what was always said by the witnesses for the prosecution.) If George was not the rose—which, indeed, he was not, so far as fragrance went; for when he did not smell of ferrets, he smelled of rabbits—he was near the rose, in Richard's eyes; and at the sight of him that young gentleman ran down the ruined stairs at head-long speed.

"Well, George, how are you?"

"How goes it, Master Richard?" replied the giant. He would have been six feet five, had he been upright; his face was apple-red, from exposure to all weathers, but it was not the frank face of the countryman. It had a dogged look even now, when he would fain have worn one of deferential welcome. Not that he had any desire to play the hypocrite, for he was really glad to see the lad; but things had gone against the grain with him so long that to wear a look of conciliation was a physical impossibility with him. Moreover, something had occurred quite recently to "put him out."

Though long past middle-age, his beard was black, and the fire of his roving eyes untamed. In his youth he had been feared by man and loved by woman; but the fear was all that now remained to him of strength. When that should wane, he felt in his vague way that he should be weak indeed, and it behooved him to keep up his prestige while time permitted it. What nature had intended him for was a Robin Hood of a coarse type; but having been born a few hundred years after his due time, he had become—after some very serious vicissitudes, and thanks to the good offices of Richard rather than to his own merits—the squire's game-keeper.

"I was just thinking of you, young sir," he continued, "by reason of a letter from my missus."

"Ah! she spoke of having seen me in town, did she? She is coming home to-morrow, of course?"

"Yes, *she's* coming, right enough; but not the other."

"What on earth do you mean, George? Lucy is not staying behind her?"

"Yes; just that. I knew you'd be riled about it."

"Riled? Well, of course, I like Lucy to be at home; but what has happened? I suppose if you expressed a wish to Mrs. Parkes—"

"That Mrs. Parkes would gratify it," put in the other, grimly.

"Well, yes, I think so."

"But Miss Lucy is not my daughter, you see, and has a will of her own."

"Then she stays at her own wish," said Dick, compressing his lips.

"Well, it is my opinion there has been a plant to keep her up in town."

"A plant?"

"Yes. You see everybody is not so trustful of you, Master Dick, as I am. They think it's dangerous for young folks like you and Lucy to be much together; and so the gal has been 'got at.' It's your aunt as has done it—at least that's my idea."

"My aunt? Aunt Edith?"

"So I read it. My missus writes as Susan told Miss Talbot that Lucy had a talent for singing, and now it seems it is to be brought out. She's to be put in a choir where the organ (this is what Susan says, but bust me if I understand it) can be deweloped."

"That's a mere excuse for keeping her in London!" exclaimed Richard, vehemently.

"Ain't I been a-telling you so all along? Now, what I say is that a choir is a bad place for a young girl. The company is too mixed, and has got too many opportunities of mixing." And Mr. Parkes drew himself up (all but his slouch) to express the severity of his moral views.

"You couldn't write and say that you object to the arrangement?" observed Richard, doubtfully.

"Well, of course I could; or, rather, my missus could write it for me. But what would be the good of that? If Lucy don't mean to come, she won't. I ain't her father, and as for her mother, she don't care a button about her." Here Mr. Parkes suddenly recollected that he must not paint his picture of the young woman in a too unflattering way, and added, in explanation, "Not that she ain't fond of the missus—indeed, she dotes upon her; but she's just at that age when a girl likes to have things her own way. When they're married to husbands of the right sort, their mouths get soft enough, and one can guide 'em with a snaffle."

This prospect of matrimonial ease was far too distant to afford Mr. Richard Talbot any consolation for his present disappointment.

"My father's right—she's a Jesuit!" he exclaimed, with irritation.

"Well, no, Master Richard, I wouldn't go for to say that. She's a little wild and coltish, but there's no vice about her; and if you only know how to play your cards—"

"Tush! I was not speaking of Lucy." Dick turned away abruptly from his favorite giant, and at once began to retrace his steps toward home. The sun was shining, the birds were singing, and nature in her robe of green was smiling around him as before; but for him there was no light, no music, no color, in either earth or air, and man and woman (especially woman) were grown false or schemers. The whole arrangements of the universe were out of gear, in his eyes, because Miss Lucy Lindon was about to develop her talents for vocal melody.

CHAPTER XI.

A FINE OLD ENGLISH GENTLEMAN.

THERE are a good many people who have no high opinion of letters, who yet believe in them when tacked to a man's name. V.C. (when they do not stand for Vice-Chairman, in which case they are not always creditable) are deservedly held in estimation; K.C.B. are valuable adjuncts; and even F.R.S. have their ad-

mirers. But in the country there are no letters which "in this connection" (as Cousin Jonathan phrases it) are so exceedingly esteemed as M.F.H. When a man has once been a Master of Foxhounds he can hope for no higher dignity, but is like a Lord Mayor who has passed the chair. To this eminence had Mr. Reginald Pole, of Masham Manor, the estate contiguous to that of Talbot Tower, attained in years gone by, and the knowledge of it excited a reverence in Master Richard Talbot's mind which I am afraid it would have refused to higher claims upon it. The old gentleman, moreover, had been always good to him; had often given him the proceeds of a rubber at whist, as a knight of old used to dispense the gains of his skill in tourney to some favorite page; and had mitigated the melancholy of many a vacation at the Tower by an invitation to the manor.

It seemed strange to many, and to Mr. Freeman in particular, that Mr. Talbot permitted his son to visit at such a house, where not only cards, as the reverend gentleman put it, "had their attractions," but most of the pleasures of this world were to be found in profusion, and but little was thought of the next. It was only a part of the inconsistency which, as I have said, Mr. Talbot had exhibited of late years in respect to his son, whose very presence at the Tower seemed at times unwelcome to him; but it was a very striking example of it. For to say truth, it would have been a compliment to call old Reginald Pole "little better than one of the wicked." He was fatter than Falstaff by many pounds—for years no horse could have carried him, even if the resources of science could have contrived a machine to lift him in the saddle—and he had grown more "carnal" with his increasing bulk. If he had lived a town life he must long ago have come to the end of it, but the country air, and exercise (while he could take it), and the general wholesomeness of his surroundings, had counteracted the effects of a course of existence which the term "fast" would have described but feebly. He had run through two large fortunes, and "please Heaven," was his own pious statement, "he would run through a third, if only time enough were granted to him." There were stories afloat to the disadvantage of his conscientious observance of the truth, but in this respect he was a man of his word. As nothing could stop him, his heir and grandson, Henry Pole, took the wisest course that was left to him, by residing at the manor, where he was very welcome, and taking his share of the good things while they were still going.

Old Reginald himself belonged to the same generation as Algernon Talbot, but he had been much more intimate with Francis, in his wild days, than with his father. They had heard the chimes at midnight together very often, and it was understood, when the younger man had become convinced of the error of his ways, that he had made a very earnest appeal to the elder to turn from his evil courses ere it should be too late. His reply had been brief, but characteristic—"Dear Frank, I never hedge." The two men had not met since, save once or twice upon the road, when they did not exchange a syllable. But neither felt for the other any harsher sentiment than pity. *Mr. Pole thought his old friend a fool for being frightened at a shadow, and giv-*

ing up "cakes and ale;" while in Mr. Talbot's eyes this old man, who clutched at gauds (or worse) upon the brink of the grave, was nothing short of a madman; but the tender touch of old companionship was felt by both.

"If you will let your boy come over to the manor he will find some young friends. I shall not bite him," old Reginald had written a few months after their estrangement; and Mr. Talbot had permitted his son to go. Invitations had come since again and again, with the like result. But when one came from the same quarter some weeks after Dick's final return from Eton, Mr. Talbot hesitated as to what he should reply. He was conscious that the boy had now reached an age when not only bad example would be injurious to him, but the lax views of life and conduct prevalent in the society he would meet under Mr. Pole's roof might leave a permanent impression on him. He had, he felt, shut his eyes to this matter long enough, indeed too long; and yet, ever since he had made that confession to the lad respecting the duel (though not on that account), Dick's presence had become more and more embarrassing to him. It was strange, indeed, that he should wish to part with one so dear to him; but just as a man sometimes prefers a picture dearer to him than all other things he has, yet one which he shrinks from looking on, and hangs a curtain over it, by reason of certain associations it evokes, so was it with Francis Talbot as respected his son. He would have been glad of the excuse of his former friend's invitation to get Dick away, and be left to himself, and his grim theology and grimmer thoughts; but, on the other hand, his conscience pricked him, feeling that such a visit would not be good for the lad.

In this perplexity Mr. Talbot resolved to consult the rector, who, he was well aware, would hold a strong opinion upon the subject, and confirm him by the expression of it in the right course. To need an ally in such a matter was, of course, a proof of weakness; but, on the other hand, he called him in to correct what he knew to be amiss in himself, and to override the arguments of his own feelings. Directly he had sent for him he repented of it, and had half a mind to recall the messenger, and when Mr. Freeman came he could have found it in his heart to feign another cause for having sent for him. Instead of putting the case before him, as he had intended to do, for his unbiassed judgment, he even began to press upon him some arguments in favor of Dick's going to Masham, that had had, in fact, but little force even with himself, and that he well knew would be as dust in the balance in Mr. Freeman's mind when weighed against the dangers to which the young man's principles would be exposed, and which, when even he was a boy, the rector had painted in "colors of eclipse."

"You see, Freeman, the boy feels lonely here; indeed, I have never seen him so out of spirits as during this first week of his summer holidays. There are no out-of-door sports to occupy himself in, and at home, Heaven knows, he finds no bright companion. At Masham, on the contrary, there is Henry Pole himself, and his sister Margaret, and moreover, on this occasion, an old school-fellow of Dick's, one Leonard Greene, a young man of talent, who is already at St. Clement's, where he will be in October; and one

can't shut a lad up in the Tower, like a young princess in a fairy tale, so that no person can get at him."

"Of course not," said the rector, rather unexpectedly, "and, indeed, there may be harm even at the Tower. You are wrapped up in your own pursuits, and the boy is left not only to himself, which, as you say, affects his spirits, but perhaps even to worse company, such as grooms and game-keepers."

Mr. Talbot winced at this, for he saw in the last word a reference to Mr. George Parkes. He had made him game-keeper at the earnest intercession of young Richard when he was a mere child, but at a time when his wishes had had far greater influence with him than at present. Dick only knew that he was asking for preferment for a dear companion, who had a better acquaintance with birds and beasts than any natural-history book, and could find a wren's nest or a lark's with equal facility; nor were Mr. Talbot's habits such as to make him conversant with the man's character more than with that of any other humble tenant of the estate. But his compliance with his son's request had been little short of a public scandal. Mr. Parkes had been more than once not only "in trouble," but its consequences, in prison; he had been hitherto a terror, not to evil-doers, but to the guardians of public order, at all events, as regarded the woods and fields; and he had married the prettiest widow in the parish at a period most unfashionably immediate upon his first wife's death—within, indeed, six months of it. It was this last impropriety, much more than his poaching propensities, that had made the first person in the parish (next to Mr. Talbot), and who, I need not say, was the rector's wife, most bitter against him, and she had done all in her power to get the appointment cancelled. But her zeal had outrun her discretion. She had caused her mouth-piece, the rector, to make his remonstrance in such vehement terms as had annoyed the squire, in whom something of the old leaven of obstinacy that had helped to estrange him from his father still remained. The comely Mrs. Parkes had come up to the Tower to plead her husband's cause—not upon its merits, indeed, but on the ground of her connection with Dick in his earliest years; and would, perhaps, have failed, but for Mrs. Freeman. That lady could not avoid remarking on that visit—it was not, perhaps, in female nature to refrain from doing so—in quarters through which it afterward came round to the squire's ears, that it would be shameful if he listened to the prayer of beauty instead of the voice of justice, which had naturally the very contrary effect to that which was intended. From that moment there had been a breach—so far as breaches are possible among "the elect"—between the squire and the rector's wife; and the subject of George Parkes was always a sore one with him.

"I am not aware that Richard has contracted harm from any of my servants, Mr. Freeman," said the squire, stiffly.

"Nor I," said the rector, "but he has now reached a time of life when he may easily do so. It is probable that he may be soon turning his thoughts in the direction of the opposite sex; and it is most important, even as a temporary measure, and supposing that nothing should come of it, that he should form some virtuous attachment."

The squire stared, as well he might; for if this recipe had ever occurred to him, it had certainly not done so in connection with Dick.

"Why, the boy has hardly left school, Freeman!"

"That is true, my friend, but it is not too soon to give his thoughts on such matters a good direction. Now, there is Margaret Pole, as you say, as well-principled a young woman in a conventional sense—for, alas! who is there in her position of whom we can speak as having a real knowledge of the truth?—as is to be found in this neighborhood, notwithstanding her frivolous surroundings; if Richard should take a liking for her, for we need suppose no more than that, it would act as a life-belt to a weak swimmer. He would be sustained above the waves of passion, and in due time, even if the matter should go no farther—you are the best judge of the advisability of that—he could be trusted in the tempestuous ocean of life alone."

Not one word had the rector uttered concerning the wiles and fascinations of the world as exhibited at Masham; not a syllable concerning "Belial," as he was wont to term Mr. Reginald Pole. The company at the manor might have been a Young Man's Improvement Society for aught that he had to say against it. Mr. Talbot was fairly staggered by this unlooked-for falling in with his own secret wishes, and half expected some crushing addenda—a favorite dialectic manoeuvre with the rector—which should sweep away all these roseate views in a stern outburst of condemnation.

He would not have been so well satisfied with his companion's views, had he guessed that the rector's wife was preaching to him through the lips of her husband. Mrs. Freeman had no more suspicion than her neighbors that there was anything "serious" between "Master Richard" and Miss Lucy Lindon; she never went near the spinney, nor had she any certain knowledge of what went on at it; but ever since Mrs. Parkes had got the advantage of her with respect to that piece of patronage in connection with the woods and forests she felt that she was a designing woman, and would stick at nothing to gain her ends. She had also, of course, seen Lucy in the village, and acknowledged to herself that though she had "not a feature, when you took her to pieces," she was just that "taking" sort of young person who drag so many innocent youths of the other sex into perdition through their meretricious attractions. It was impossible, of course, that any mischief could have been done yet; but in her opinion it was high time that Master Richard should mix with female society of his own class; and she had of late strongly urged upon her husband the necessity of this step, with a special reference to Miss Margaret Pole. Her own surviving daughter was ten years older than Dick, in spite of which disparity in years she would not, perhaps, have hesitated to save the squire's son by that agency, had not her dear Mary also been married; had she been still single, Mrs. Freeman would, doubtless, have looked upon the attractions of Masham Manor with apprehension; but, as it was, they were infinitely less dangerous in her eyes than the fascinations of low-born beauty.

It is doubtful whether the rector went all the way with his wife upon this momentous question,

but he had had such unpleasant experiences of going in the contrary direction that he dared not neglect this opportunity of stating her views, and they were eminently satisfactory to the squire.

As to Dick, the disappointment he suffered in Lucy's absence had made Durnton well-nigh intolerable to him, and caused any place to seem preferable to his own home. Love was, of course, the paramount passion with him, but next to it were the charms of friendship; and Masham had on this occasion an unwonted attraction in the presence of Leonard Greene, a far-away cousin of the Poles, who had been invited to spend some part of his long vacation at the manor. The bond of their friendship was somewhat inexplicable, except on that ground of "thy unlikeliness fitting mine" by which the poet somewhat paradoxically accounts for a similar phenomenon in his own case.

Talbot, though he had plenty of wit, or at least of the high spirits and ready speech that in boyhood passes for it, was ignorant of books, and despised them. He was as fond of hunting and shooting as a Pawnee, though, as we have seen, with a weakness toward the squaws (or one of them) that would have been derogatory to the character of the noble savage; while Greene was devoted to all kinds of literature that were not imposed upon him by his tutors, and to some which were absolutely forbidden by them. At cricket and football he was a very indifferent performer, but could play on the piano like a young lady, and sing songs that were far beyond, or at least outside, of any young lady's *répertoire*. His wit was so lively and natural that no punishment that could be devised by his school-fellows, nine out of ten of whom detested "facetiousness" as a beggar hates a lord, could drive it out of him. Their revenge was to call him "Tommy"—not after Tommy Moore, whom in his diminutive stature and accomplishments he really somewhat resembled—but, after the wicked hero of the nursery ballad, Tommy Greene, who put pussy down the well; and this epithet of "Pussy" clung to him, and annoyed him, down to his dying day.

He had been for a couple of terms at St. Clement's, Cambridge, where he had already found a general welcome, which, to say the truth, had been denied to him at school, and had distinguished himself in the eyes of the authorities for an epigram, which had almost caused his rustication. On the great festival of the Church in connection with the return of Charles the Second of pious memory, he had struck off the usual printed statement on the hall screens all the words after *gratia*, and substituted the following lines,

"For the sake of him who sold
Dunkirk to the French,
And gave away the gold
To a naughty little wench,"

and he had been detected in that very act by the master of his college.

"That—aw—screen—aw—young gentleman" (such was his observation) "is not for the—aw—promulgation of your political sentiments."

With which reproof the affair would have ended, but that Pussy, instead of bowing to this obvious truth, had been foolish enough to argue the point on the highest principles; for he was

a radical and republican to the backbone, as is the case with many a bright young boy till he comes to mix with the duller full-grown ones of the same way of thinking.

Dick could, perhaps, have persuaded his father to ask Greene to stay at the Tower, but he had somehow shrunk from doing so—things were so very different at home from what they were elsewhere, and many of them, he felt, would be so extremely obnoxious to his young friend. He had a suspicion, too, that the latter would find out within the first twenty-four hours the attraction that drew him to the spinney, and it was probable that even the sacredness of the tender passion would not restrain Mr. Greene's inclinations for satire.

If matters at the Tower were not very much in Pussy Greene's way, those at the manor were hardly more, so. The atmosphere there was, metaphorically, horsey. The saddle-room was a more important apartment than the study, and the books that were most highly prized among the male society who frequented the place were of a shape unknown to "the Row," and provided with a metallic pencil. Mr. Reginald Pole had possessed, as a young man, a great stud of race-horses, by the aid of which he ran through a large estate in one of the shortest periods on record. He had then married an heiress, and, made wiser by experience, had kept hounds instead of horses; but he had, unfortunately, still continued to back his own opinion on the turf, and it had seldom proved a judicious one. Within ten years he had found himself as poor as before. But mark how noble deeds, even though materially unsuccessful, will bear their fruit. He continued to be immensely respected on account of the money he had lost, and the splendid way in which he had got through it. He had lost his wife, too; and this, though he himself bore the calamity with a dignified calm, which by some vulgar persons was even taken for indifference, made him naturally an object of interest. And, then, there was none of that vile *appearance* of poverty about him, which is what alone makes it abhorrent to good society. Mr. Reginald Pole continued to eat and drink of the very best, and, indeed, as time grew on, developed his tastes for the table in quite an extraordinary degree. This weakness (if it may be called so), combined with a diminution in his habits of horse exercise, caused him to grow enormously stout. With every year he added to himself, like a stately tree, a certain "ring," or additional excess of girth, so that an observant eye could have accurately estimated his age, after fifty, by his rotundity. Sorrow had no effect on it whatever, though this fine old gentleman had had his troubles. His only son died when a very young man, though not before he had married and begotten two children—Henry and Margaret—now grown up, and resident with their grandfather at the manor. And still the old gentleman ate and drank without stint, taking everything (good) as he found it, and never indulging in bad language (though he *had* been an M.F.H.) unless irritated. The reward of all this patience and philosophy came to him when he was about sixty-five years old, and many feet in circumference in a third fortune, which dropped to him unexpectedly from a distant relative; and at an age when many men of weaker digestive powers are

beginning to think of their latter end Mr. Reginald Pole began life anew.

His views of happiness were mitigated by circumstance, but were in the main unchanged; his capabilities of enjoyment were curtailed, but what was left of them he fostered to the uttermost, and, mindful of the briefness of his mortal tenure, instead of paying off the mortgages with which he had encumbered the estate, this noble-hearted old fellow spent his income like a prince to the last shilling, and even beyond it. He was far too prudent to squander his money on what are called "improvements" in his farms or houses, which at his time of life would have been folly indeed; but he caused the manor, as his mansion was called, which had fallen into rather a dilapidated state in the time of his troubles, to be thoroughly refurnished, and all the grounds about it to be put in order. The paddock, in which a couple of racing colts were generally to be found, was an object of his special solicitude; the hot-houses were kept in a state of great perfection, for pineapples were his favorite fruit, and grapes were recommended by his medical adviser; but, curiously enough, there was no such thing as a croquet-ground at Masham. Vulgar people said this was because Mr. Pole did not play croquet; but the reason was well understood among the better class to be that this fine old English gentleman objected to such modern innovations, which he termed, generically, French fal-lals, and wished everything about his ancestral home to be in the fine old English style. It was, doubtless, his innate respect for age that caused him to insist upon being helped first, even before the ladies, at his own table, as well as at those of other people who entertained a proper sense of his importance; and to see him dining with a napkin under his chin and his own body-servant, a young fellow who had a very strong family resemblance to him, was really a picture of human happiness—and on a large scale—that made the heart leap up for joy. Leonard Greene used to say (but this was in later years) that when vexed by thoughts of the ill-fortune of the wise, and the poverty and discomforts of the good, the thought of old Reginald's prosperity was always a comfort to him, because it seemed to restore the average.

Such was the host, who, without rising from his arm-chair—a feat, indeed, which, without extraneous assistance, would have been an impossibility—welcomed Richard to Masham. His left hand, as usual, held his snuffbox, and his right *Bell's Life*, so that the usual form of salutation was dispensed with; but he gave him a cordial greeting, nevertheless, asked good-humoredly after his father, offered him a pinch of his "prince's mixture," and, when he had done sneezing, sent him into the garden, "where he would find the two girls and the 'exotic' netting;" an expression which conveyed Mr. Pole's contempt for the effeminacy of Mr. Leonard Greene, on the one hand, and for the newfangled amusement of lawn-tennis, on the other.

CHAPTER XII.

A SERIOUS REHEARSAL.

Who "the girls" were to whom Mr. Pole had made such curt allusion, Richard did not know; or, rather, the use of the plural puzzled him. The only young lady whom he had expected to see was Margaret Pole, a plump and pretty girl of eighteen, who entertained the erroneous idea that violent exercise would prevent her growing fat, and who had taken to lawn-tennis, as it were, medicinally. Her complexion was colorless as cream, with something, moreover, soft and luscious about it which reminded one of that commodity; it also suggested, especially to those who knew her grandfather, that in the churn of time she would become of a still firmer consistency; but at present she was all that she should be in point of form, with none of those angularities which, particularly in the region of the elbows, are wont to detract from the charms of her contemporaries.

"My dear Richard, you are come just in time to save Leonard's life," said she, "for we are killing him between us. Oh, I forgot; you don't know my friend: Mr. Richard Talbot, Miss Meredith."

The young gentleman brought his feet together (for boxing and deportment had been his two extras at Eton), and executed an elaborate bow.

"Now don't waste your strength, my dear boy, in polite athletics," shouted Greene; "here's your racket, and you're in on my side."

But to this the ladies would not consent. They had scored six to Mr. Greene's one, and they objected to any assistance being given to their victim till he should have been completely subdued. So Richard sat on a garden-bench to see the game out. It offered little excitement in itself, for it was less a contest than a massacre, but an opportunity was thus afforded him of taking stock of the unknown player. Miss Meredith was a year or two older than her friend, much taller, darker, and more strongly built, though not so plump; and she was as agile as a panther. Her back-hair had escaped from its fastenings, and was streaming behind her like a comet.

Mr. Greene had drawn her attention to this fact in hopes to mitigate her activity; he had even pretended that the comet had gone over the wall; but, as it happened, it was an ornament of nature's own, and she knew better. The suggestion had only made her laugh a little, and Mr. Greene himself a good deal, which placed him still more at her mercy. It was piteous to see how the little man flew hither and thither after the ball, and when he was lucky enough to hit it, always sent it into the net, or out of bounds. At last, however, to his infinite relief, he was beaten, and lay on the sward with his racket crossed over his breast like a dead Crusader, till a footman came with the claret-cup, which revived him.

To behold the young people enjoying this agreeable beverage, under a spreading beech-tree on the velvet lawn, was a pretty sight; very different, thought Richard, from anything to be seen at Talbot Tower, and his spirits rose within him. Hitherto they had been only sustained by a sense of injury, which is not a good substitute for cheerfulness. He thought Lucy had behaved ill to him in remaining in town to develop her

organ of melody. She had broken no promise to him, it was true, as to returning to Durnton; but then they had neither of them entertained a doubt as to her coming home with her mother. He had shown his ill-humor, as he thought, by not writing to her; whereas, since he had never written but once to her before (to tell her he was coming from Eton to see her in Ford's Alley), his silence perhaps did not seem to her a matter of reproach; while as to her writing to him—and at the Tower too—that had not entered into either of their minds. They were aware of the conventions of the world, though they did not pay them due respect, just as Pussy Greene used to say of his own laughter-loving nature, that “it knew the laws of gravity, though it did not obey them.” At Durnton—with the exception of the rector's wife, who was not calculated to form a substitute for his fair enslaver—there was no female society whatever; so that his present circumstances had all the charm of novelty, in addition to their intrinsic attraction.

It is impossible, of course, for the faithful swain to forget the absent object of his love, but it is less necessary for him to be always thinking about her when he is surrounded by young persons of her own sex. It may be said, perhaps, that they should only serve to remind him of her; but in the present case it so happened that neither Margaret nor Miss Meredith did this. They had, you see, not a characteristic in common with Lucy, and of course could not converse with him about a young lady, however interesting, of whom they had never heard. Richard not only felt “at home” in the ordinary sense at Masham, but experienced that sensation of security and repose which only a visit to a country-house, where we are welcomed as one of the family, and “worn as an old glove,” perhaps affords. This gives a great advantage to the country over the town in all matters of courtship; and is the reason why girls in the provinces “go off”—though, it is true, not always eligibly—so much more easily than in the metropolis. The homely comforts of a rural residence, and the quiet of its surroundings, and perhaps also the absence of much else to do, seem to suggest serious love-making and ideas of settlement in life.

Richard, of course, was but a boy, and, besides, bespoken; but it seemed to him somehow that it would be very pleasant to stay at Masham ever so long, with these two nice girls and Pussy Greene. He had had his share of the claret-cup, it is true, but that only, as it were, sublimed his sentiments. Sitting on the grass at the (four) feet of beauty, and smoking his cigar—for Pussy declined to begin tennis again till nature had been invigorated by tobacco—his eyes wandered over the well-kept gardens, with the broad water beyond, in which the carp slept, and then to the tall elm-trees, with the spire of the village church among them, with a content of which a few hours ago he would have deemed himself incapable. He was not called upon to talk, but it was pleasant to listen to the lively badinage which his friend carried on with Miss Meredith, and in which “he got as good as he gave.” The occasional glance of significance—“How well those two are getting on together,” it said—which *Margaret Pole bestowed upon him* was very agreeable to Dick, and he felt altogether less

lovelorn, disgusted, and wronged than he had done since Lucy had failed him. At the lawn-tennis he had Margaret for his partner, and he could not help acknowledging to himself what a very nice partner she made; not that she was very good at the game, being soon put out of breath and not distinguished by activity, but the very way in which she missed the ball and called herself “so stupid” had somehow an attraction in it; while as for the score, he was such a superior player to poor Greene that they obtained an easy victory, in spite of Miss Meredith's noble exertions.

It was touching to see how that young lady now stood by her inefficient ally, and strove to defend him from the jeers of his antagonists; like one who feels another dependent on him for support, she made quite superhuman efforts to make up for his shortcomings, and when they failed, exhibited a sort of maternal solicitude about him, which, I am sorry to say, was an object of jest to the victors. The fact was, that, though Mr. Leonard Greene had been but a few days at Masham, Margaret's keen eyes had noticed a budding attachment between him and her friend, which should have aroused her tenderest sympathies, only it was so ridiculously incongruous. Anne Meredith was a sort of Diana Vernon in her way; had brought a groom as well as a lady's maid to the manor, and a couple of riding-horses, on which, or at least on one of which, she was wont in the hunting season to “show the way” to many a redcoat. She talked about mares and fillies with exactitude, while to Mr. Greene a horse, like Wordsworth's primrose, was a horse and nothing more—except, indeed, that it also seemed to him a dangerous quadruped, often affected with St. Vitus's dance, and always applying crucial tests to the equilibrium of its rider. Yet between these two quite a serious flirtation had sprung up, to the admiration of all beholders:

“Love took up the harp of Life, and smote on all the chords with might,
Struck the chord of Self, that, trembling, pass'd in music out of sight,”

and in the young gentleman's case so very much so, that he had even gone to the extent of accompanying the lady and her friend on a riding excursion. They had hopped over a little ditch, which to Greene had seemed impassable, and when Miss Meredith assured him that he could “take it in a fly,” had answered that he would much prefer to take it in a fly than on horseback. The result had proved that an intelligent man always knows what he can't do at least as well as what he can. Mr. Greene had “come a cropper.”

With this element of amusement, added to the usual attractions of the manor, it was no wonder that Dick enjoyed himself under its roof; for fun at a friend's expense, especially if he has been wont to enjoy it at our own, is one of the pleasantest of sensations; and then he had the advantage of sharing it with Margaret Pole, which enhanced the pleasure immensely.

The four young people stuck together, and made a little coterie of their own at the manor, which was, however, full of company. Henry Pole had been in the Plungers till he had grown tired of soldiering—i. e., in about eighteen months

—and sold out; and several “fellows” from the same regiment were now staying with him at his grandfather’s house. The old gentleman never grudged hospitality to the army. Moreover he was a great supporter of the Church—though somewhat like a flying buttress, i. e., he always remained outside of it—and the rector or the curate of Masham were generally to be found at his table. Mr. Meredith, too, Anne’s uncle and guardian, and an old friend of her host’s, had come with her, though she needed no chaperon, and gave no sign of quitting his comfortable quarters. He was an excellent fellow, but of a very matter-of-fact cast of mind. The young folks improvised some private theatricals, and though he was no actor, he proved a most admirable ally, and bore the title of General Utility they conferred upon him with great good-nature. He would hear them their parts with the utmost patience, and could be always trusted not to annoy them by telling them the missing word just as it was on the tip of their tongues.

Every one knows how soon acquaintance ripens in the glare of the foot-lights; what significance a young gentleman can throw into a phrase out of a stage-play; and on what a pleasing footing it sets one with a young person of the opposite sex to have one’s cheeks rouged, or one’s moustache gummed on, by her adroit and dainty fingers. The Plungers, the curate, Henry Pole, and all connected with the greenroom felt this influence of Thespis in relation to the tender passion, to which the fact of Miss Meredith being an heiress gave, perhaps, an additional zest, but Pussy Greene, who was thoroughly at home in the sock and buskin, and never behaved more naturally than when he was acting, fell seriously in love. It was like a family vaccination, in which the majority feel a little temporary inconvenience from the operation, but one will “take” so very “favorably” that he is useless for ordinary purposes of life, and can think of nothing but his arm.

A few days before the great performance, to which half the county were invited, was to come off, this young man was taken with quite a paroxysm. He was determined to know his fate; and the chivalry of his disposition induced him to apply to Mr. Meredith, instead of his niece, for the information. He was conscious that he was a poor match for her: he had a few hundreds a year of his own, and she had as many thousands; and he thought it right to take no advantage of his darling’s ignorance of the world, and possibly of her inclination for himself. He could have carried her, he flattered himself, by a *coup de main*, but he preferred to lay siege to her in due form, through the approaches of her uncle, guardian, and solicitor. After a late rehearsal and supper, one evening, he happened to find these three gentlemen “rolled into one” enjoying his cigar in the garden, at the back of the arbor.

“Hullo, Don Caesar!” was the good-natured greeting (for Greene was in his theatrical garb), “have you come for a breath of fresh air to sweep away the smell of the foot-lights?”

“Yes, sir; and for a few words with you, if you will kindly hear them.”

“By all means, my lad. I am quite at your service.” This genial frankness a little dashed the young man; he thought Mr. Meredith might

have had some inkling of his matrimonial intentions, and would have preferred to have been received with a little more stiffness of manner. He therefore threw into his rejoinder a certain gravity very alien to his natural tone, and which he intended to mark the seriousness of the matter in hand.

“My subject, sir, is your charming ward—a young lady for whom, though I have had but a short acquaintance with her, I have the highest respect, regard, and—and—affection.”

“Very good,” said the lawyer; “take your time; don’t hurry.”

“You are most kind, sir. Of course, it’s a little difficult to select the exact words, yet I feel it is so important to do so.”

“Just so. Exactness is everything. One minute, while I light another cigar—all right.”

“I think upon the score of family you will find nothing to object to. My parents, unhappily, are dead, but they filled a good if not a high position in this neighborhood, and were much respected. They left me, not indeed a wealthy man, but in independent circumstances.”

Mr. Greene paused, expecting the other, perhaps, to ask how much they had left him. But he only nodded, and said, “Go on.”

“I have not as yet, sir, ventured to express my feelings to the young lady. I felt that I should, in the first instance, address myself to you. But if your permission is given me to speak to her, I am not without a hope that—that—”

“Take time, take time,” interrupted the other, imperturbably. “You are not without a hope that—”

“Just so, sir; that she herself may not be wholly indifferent to me. It is true we are both young, but there are circumstances—that is, opportunities—life, sir, I mean, is not measured by moments.”

“I think you must be mistaken there, Mr. Greene.”

“Mistaken? No, sir; I may, as I have said, do myself an injustice in expression, but my love for Anne—”

“Anne!” exclaimed Mr. Meredith, taking his cigar just in time between his fingers before his jaw dropped. “Is it possible that you are talking about my niece?”

“Why of course I am! Did I not say so?”

“My good boy, I thought you were rehearsing your new part. I thought it was a stage-play. I thought—” A roar of laughter burst from the old gentleman as he plumped down on the garden seat, and was re-echoed from the arbor, in which Mr. Richard Talbot had been ensconced with his cigar throughout the interview.

“I did not know you were an eavesdropper!” cried Greene, in an intensity of passion.

“My dear fellow,” sobbed Richard, for his mirth was absolutely hysterical, “I did not know you were going to talk about private affairs. And when I found out what it was, and that Mr. Meredith did not understand you—I had not the strength to interfere. I was obliged to stuff my pocket-handkerchief into my mouth—”

“A very nasty trick,” interpolated the other, savagely.

But his enemies only roared the louder.

There are some “situations” in which the sense of the ridiculous overwhelms all other feel-

ings: no wit, nor even humor, expressed however happily, can approach them as a laughter-moving cause; they recur to us quite involuntarily, and often on the most inopportune occasions—by the grave's side, or in the lonely watches of the night—and tickle our very heart-strings. And this misunderstanding between Mr. Greene and the guardian of his beloved object was one of them. His seriousness and ire only fed the flame of mirth in his two companions. They were really sorry for him; they would have looked grave if they could, and Mr. Meredith particularly wished to do so, now that he understood the real nature of Mr. Greene's application; but the very elements of sobriety were shattered within him, and an attempt at speech only produced a new paroxysm of laughter.

"It is all very amusing, I have no doubt," said the unfortunate suitor, with an air of austerity that was almost the death of Dick, "but you are now at least aware—"

Mr. Meredith, a stout gentleman to begin with, and by this time quite purple and swollen, held up his hand for silence, "Not now," gasped he. "My dear sir, not now. Let us talk about it another time."

"And in the meanwhile you will be telling everybody—you two—and making me the laughing-stock of the house."

"No, we won't; we won't indeed," answered the other, with the tears in his eyes. "Talbot will promise not to tell."

Dick removed his pocket-handkerchief to give the required guarantee, and then stuffed it back again.

Mr. Greene stalked off without a word, like the ghost in "Hamlet." Richard kept his promise, which was fortunate for him, as he was presently fated to be in a position greatly more embarrassing than that of his friend, and in which the reticence of Mr. Greene was of still greater importance to him than his own had been in the other case.

CHAPTER XIII.

A POSTSCRIPT.

"THE world is small," was an observation made to me once by a person who had gone round it; and the same remark has occurred to others who have stopped at home, but looked about them. It is astonishing how constantly, and yet always with a foolish sense of unexpectedness, one knocks against total strangers who are tolerably well acquainted with us or our belongings. An instance of this happened to Dick on the night on which the theatricals had come off (with complete success). He found himself, on a second visit to the supper-table—the visit of business, when the ladies had taken their little pickings and gone away—beside an unknown guest. His name is of little consequence, but as a matter of fact, it was Townsend, a man about town staying with people in the neighborhood who had asked leave of Miss Pole to bring their friend "to your delightful performances."

"I believe I know an aunt of yours," said he. "Same name; at least"—he had seen Dick's in the play-bill—"and comes from Suffolk."

Dick did not think it likely, and with the frankness of his age expressed that view. The

stranger had a drawl, and waxed mustaches, which made his acquaintance with Aunt Edith improbable; and, then, Dick did not relish telling everybody that she was a Sister of Mercy.

"If her name is Edith, I am right, however," continued this gentleman. "'Sister Edith,' she calls herself; living with her relative, Lady Earnshaw."

"That is my aunt Edith," acknowledged Dick.

"Thought so; see a family likeness. The lady knows my mother; belongs to the same club—I mean Dorcas club."

Dick nodded. This conversation did not interest him much. Moreover, there was of course a little dancing after the play, and Margaret Pole had promised him the second waltz after supper, and he was nearly due.

"Ever go to church with her—to St. Ethelburga's?"

"Never. It is not much in my way," said Dick, with a grand air. He meant it to be understood that the established ecclesiastical system had received his best consideration, but had failed to impress him favorably.

"Ah! then you miss something. The singing is the best in London."

"I don't care for singing—at least, not for that sort," said Dick, with a mental reservation in favor of that art as practised at the music-halls.

"But you care for a singer, I suppose, if she is magnificent—I mean, to look at. There is a girl in the choir there—her name is Lindon. I got my mother to ask your aunt about her. By Jove, it's worth going to church three times a day to get a sight of her! But you've seen her, perhaps?"

"Never," said Dick, with promptitude, and burying his features in the foam of champagne.

"Then you'd better be quick about it. She's quite the rage in London—that is, with the few who know of her existence. I should not tell you, perhaps, if you didn't live in the country; but a pretty girl is like a turf secret—it's almost impossible, nowadays, to keep her to yourself."

"To yourself?" echoed Dick, savagely; "what the devil do you mean?"

The stranger stuck his glass in his eye, and regarded his young friend as though he had been Don Quixote in his armor.

"Well, really," said he; "if you constitute yourself the guardian and knight-errant of all your aunt's protégés, you will have enough to do; not that you need to lay lance in rest against your humble servant upon Miss Lindon's account. She's a perfect Una, for all I know—and most certainly the lion."

"The lion," repeated Dick, who, being unacquainted with Spenser, missed the poetic allusion.

"Yes. Her voice has taken captive the town, which means, perhaps, a hundred of her own sex and half a dozen of ours. And it is not a case of *vox et prætera nihil*; she is so charming to look at. One goes not only to hear, but to see. The great secret of how to bring the male sex to church has been discovered by this young woman. They get up before daylight—or at least sit up all night—in order to attend matins at St. Ethelburga's. There is quite a mania for ritualism in the Guards' club."

Dick said "Indeed" in his stiffest manner,

and rose from his seat. He had now no wish to waltz with Margaret, but only to escape from this odious stranger. It was to become a "lion" in a London choir and to create a *furor* among the household troops, then, that Lucy had deserted him! She was a vain, egotistic, heartless creature. She had not wasted a thought upon how he had pined for her, and what he had suffered for her sake all alone at Durnton. For all she knew, he was at Durnton still. She had forgotten him altogether in that giddy round of pleasure. Well, he would forget her in the intoxications of the waltz. He had been faithful to her up to that moment; but since she could sit in the gallery at St. Ethelburga's, and make eyes at men with waxed mustaches, he would have a little pleasure on his own account. With this delicious revenge in view, he danced with such unwonted demonstrativeness that Margaret cried, "Don't squeeze so, Dick, nor tread on my toes. What makes you so awkward?" She thought he had had too much champagne, and felt quite glad to get rid of him. He left the glittering scene in disgust, and retired to his own apartment. He had read somewhere (I am afraid it was in the "Trial in Pickwick") about the impossibility of smiling when the heart is soured, and he felt the truth of the observation. He would tear from his bosom the memory of this graceless girl. It would leave a void, no doubt—henceforward life would be a blank to him; but what matter?

Then he thought he would write her a few scathing lines, beginning "Madam," bidding her farewell forever. He drew a table to the open window that looked forth on the sleeping woods and waters, and through which came from afar off the sweet tones of "the flute, violin, bassoon," and the measured cadence of "the dancers dancing in tune;" and somehow, as he did so, the recollection of his last walk with Lucy through the spinney at evening came into his mind; he remembered the very words that she had said, and the sweet smile she had given him at parting; and he felt once more the touch of her velvet cheek. She had offered it to him quite frankly, but it was because she loved him; it was not for the lips of the chance-comer, even though they wore waxed mustaches, he now felt sure. How could she help people coming to church to look at her, poor dear? He might trust Aunt Edith to take precautions that they didn't get into the gallery. No, his doubts had been unworthy of him, and an insult to Lucy; but still he would write her a line.

"DEAREST LUCY, — Your not coming home on the day you promised was a sad disappointment to me. I have felt very sad and lonely ever since. Your mother seemed to think that it was 'better for you' to stay in London, though I could not quite see why. But you are not going to live there, are you? In that case I shall not see you until I pass through town on my way to Cambridge. It is quite out of the way, of course, but I must see you there. I am staying at Mr. Pole's at Masham, where a line will find me. Durnton is intolerable without you. We are going on a picnic to Swanborough Hill on Thursday. Do you remember the Hill? [Here Dick sighed, and looked so tender he might have sat for *Narcissus making love to himself.*] How

dull and barren it will look now! What are you doing with yourself, and when are you coming back to Durnton? Ever yours, lovingly,
"RICHARD."

Although he wrote thus tenderly, he still felt chagrined at her preferring (for so he termed it, and not altogether unjustifiably, since she could doubtless have done as she pleased in the matter) to stay in town rather than come home. He knew that she had an idea of "improving herself" in certain ways, which was a ridiculous idea, if she was good enough for him, and had probably seized some opportunity of so doing; but he purposely ignored this in his note.

"What are you doing with yourself?" was a very vague form of inquiry, and had certainly no reference to her music-lessons. Perhaps he had a notion that it would draw from her some explanation of the attendance of Messrs. Townsend and Co., at St. Ethelburga's. Altogether, though so fond, the epistle was rather of a tentative character.

He had written to her but once before, and she not once to him; a circumstance which, perhaps, had something to do with their mutual affection. For where there is no epistolary correspondence between two young people who are always meeting one another, there can be no disagreements—or, at least, misunderstandings. They speak their minds, and if they quarrel, which is difficult in view of one another's personal attractions, they can very literally "kiss and be friends again." Or, on the other hand, they instinctively avoid all subjects about which they are inclined to differ. Now, in letter-writing, however affectionate, there is a temptation to state what one feels deeply about, even though our correspondent attaches no such importance to it, or even dislikes it; it seems an opportunity for putting such a matter beyond the risk of mistake with him: one is glad to know that it is now in black-and-white, so that he cannot ignore it, and we do not always reflect that it is therefore all the more calculated to annoy him.

If, because Miss Lucy Lindon designed to marry Mr. Richard Talbot, she is to be termed a "designing girl," the term must cling to her. She did design it: it was the idea of her life; though not so monopolizing, as it was in Dick's case, but that even when alone she could think of other things. But in the sense in which Mrs. Freeman would have applied that appellation to her, Lucy was not "designing." She did not love Richard for his money, or his position in the world, though she thoroughly understood its superiority to her own. She loved him for his own sake, as warmly, as wildly as he loved her; but there was more method in her madness. She looked beyond the morrow, and was desirous, in her poor way, to make some preparation for the future. She understood quite clearly what an enormous obstacle to her union with Richard existed in the person of her step-father, George Parkes; and she perceived that though there was little social inconvenience in the fact of his wife being Richard's foster-mother, there would be very great objection raised to her becoming his mother-in-law. And again, she was not ignorant of her own very slight qualifications for the position of Mrs. Richard Talbot, of Talbot Tower.

Neither of these first two matters could be mended; but it was possible, she thought, to make herself less unworthy of her lover—that is, in a social point of view; for she had no mock humility with respect to other things. She knew herself to be very beautiful; she credited herself with cleverness, good sense, and virtue; and she loved the lad with all her honest heart. At the risk of exciting more scorn than pity for our heroine, we must confess that she by no means perceived her own unworthiness to its full extent, but imagined, such was her ignorance, that the devotion of her bright young being to a single object—namely Dick—was not without its material value. Yet, as we have said, she did feel herself unworthy. She knew that in ten thousand things she must presently find herself unsuited for the part she designed to occupy, and in one or two of these, at least, she thought she might improve herself beforehand. In the first place, she knew that “accomplishments” went for a good deal, and being aware that nature had given her a fine voice, she was desirous to cultivate it. Indeed, she had long nourished a certain ambition in this direction; it was the only means, as she imagined, she possessed (for the highest value she attached to her beauty at that time was that it pleased Richard) of acquiring distinction, and this it was that had caused her, as we shall hear, to fall a prey to a very simple piece of strategy on the part of Sister Edith.

Richard's letter brought a reply by return of post:

“DEAREST DICK,—I am very glad to hear from you at last, though I see you are angry with me for stopping in London. [Poor Lucy did not reckon “spelling” as an accomplishment, or perhaps was ignorant that she did not possess it.] Of course I would rather be at Durnton; oh, if I had you by my side (as the song says), how happy I should feel! But I am sure things are better as they are. Your Ant Miss Talbot—‘sister’ she calls herself, which is ridiculous, for I don’t think she would like me to be her sister, nor even her niece—has been very kind to me. She heard, it seems, from Ant Susan [each of these great ants gave a sting to Dick as he met with them, for though he was no better at spelling himself than any other ordinary Eton boy, there are degrees in these matters] about my singing, and told me what a pity it would be if I did not do what I could to improve my voice. She offered to give me lessons, and mother and Ant both seemed to wish it. But I said, ‘No, thank you,’ because I felt too proud to take the money from your Ant. Then she said I might pay her back again, if I pleased, when my voice began to bring me in money; so that I need be under no obligation. [Here Dick was dreadfully shocked; he had never felt any “obligation” so painful.] And then the quire-master of St. Ethelburga’s came, who called my voice an organ, and said it only wanted regulating to do all sorts of things. And, dear Dick, I am so happy about my voice on your account; they say I shall do great things with it; so that perhaps you will not need to be very much ashamed of your poor Lucy, after all. My progress is something astonishing, I am told, and it would be very foolish to neglect such opportunities as I have at present. I am going home for a few

hours next week to get my things (for, of course, I had never meant to stay in London, and oh, how sad Durnton will look without you! Only be sure, dear Dick, it is all for the best. Everybody is very kind to me here; and Susan, of course, and your Ant also, I must say (though she is so much too good for yours truly that she makes me feel quite wicked); and Mr. Gerald Vane (though he has a slight squint). The church is more crowded than ever, all because of my singing; only I wish it was some Theatyr instead of a Church, for there would be more chance of seeing you there. Dear Richard, I love you so, and you must forgive me for stopping away from you. I sometimes feel that it is better for us every way to be apart just now, and all the more likely that we shall some day meet never to part. [“What the deuce does she mean by *that*?” thought Dick. “How can it be better.”] And now, dear Dick, hoping this finds you as well as it leaves me,

“I am for ever and ever, yours fondly,

“LUCY LINDON.

“P.S.—As you say you are going to Swanborough Hill on Thursday, it is just possible we may catch a glimpse of one another. The trains, I see, will just fit in, so that I can stop an hour or two at the junction; and I will be under the hill where the camera stands—you know where—at three o’clock, on the chance of seeing you, dear Dick.”

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LOVER'S SEAT.

THE postscript of Lucy's letter seemed to Richard worth all the rest of it, and amply to atone for its bad spelling. He had hitherto looked forward to the picnic at Swanborough as likely to be “good fun,” but it now presented quite different features to his imagination. Who has not pictured in his mind a promised meeting of this tender kind; mapped out the very spot of the interview; enjoyed beforehand, yet without discounting, its delights; and in the mean time somewhat neglected his business? Our young friend had no business to attend to; he was one of those favorites of fortune whom it is the fashion with philosophers to pity so much while wishing they were in their shoes, who have no business to neglect: but from that moment he neglected his pleasures. It was fortunate that the theatricals were over, or he would certainly have come under the censure of the stage-manager for blunders and inattention. He helped Miss Meredith to chicken at luncheon before Mr. Pole, and even gave her the liver wing, which was the old gentleman's acknowledged property and perquisite.

The rich trail of the woodcocks, the green fat of the turtles, the backbones of the grouse, were always respectfully preserved for this fine old epicure. On one occasion, during the last winter, Dick had given his host the choice of a tidbit among good things, instead of sending him the tidbit itself. A landrail, his favorite bird, was in the centre of a dish of plovers, and Dick had said, “Shall I send you the landrail, Mr. Pole, or one of the plover?”

“You young fool, the landrail, of course!” had been the old gentleman's indignant reply.

Dick had thought at the time he should never forget that incident, and the fright it had caused him; yet now he had offended still more heinously: he had had no intention of favoring Miss Meredith at her host's expense, but his soul was far from liver wings, and soaring on the wings of love.

The very same afternoon he actually addressed Leonard Greene as "My dear Lucy;" but fortunately he took it for "Pussy," so that no harm was done beyond putting that gentleman in a passion. Greene had not the least idea of his friend's "infatuation," as he would no doubt have called it had he been aware of its existence. Young gentlemen do not, as a rule, confide in one another (as young ladies do) their little love-affairs, unless they are utterly discreditable ones. Mr. Greene, indeed, had, as we have seen, at one time disclosed his, and yet it was surprising how cool, or perhaps only how prudent, he had grown since that misunderstanding between himself and Mr. Meredith; it almost seemed that the tender plant of love had been unable to survive the storm of ridicule in which it had been so unexpectedly surprised. Still, it struck Richard that it would not be unsatisfactory to his friend to get the laugh upon his own side, and he felt quite a shudder at the opportunity he had given him, and which had been so narrowly missed. Not to think of Lucy was impossible, and if he spoke it seemed as if it was almost as impossible not to speak of her; so he kept henceforward a very jealous guard upon his lips. As the hours drew on he became more and more taciturn, so that by the time the morning of the picnic arrived it was already agreed among his friends that Dick must be in love.

"It is not with me," protested Miss Meredith, gayly.

"*Qui s'excuse s'accuse*," said Mr. Greene. It was the first approach he had made to this delicate subject since that misinterpreted confession in the garden.

"It is not with me," echoed Margaret; "I have played the rôle of elder sister to him so long that our relations are established upon that footing."

"I don't think that Mr. Richard Talbot is a marrying man," observed Miss Latour, gravely.

This lady had once been Margaret's governess, but was now retained in the establishment in a sort of nondescript capacity which it would have been difficult to define. She was useful as a chaperon to her former pupil, but invaluable to Mr. Pole, because she knew the exact proportions in which certain kindly elements—anchovies, the herbs tarragon and chevril, and cream—were to be mixed in a salad.

The idea of Dick's marrying at seventeen, and this serious allusion to it, convulsed her audience.

"You may laugh," returned the old lady, still more gravely than before, "but I can't help thinking there is something queer about Mr. Talbot."

Her sole ground for this opinion was that poor Dick had not fallen a victim to the charms of Margaret, as in her opinion he was bound to have done. She adored her old pupil, whose accomplishments also she felt to be in some sort her own, and the lack of appreciation of them on the part of any male creature as a slight to herself. It is so difficult to avoid wounding the *amour propre* of some people.

Miss Latour, of course, was to be one of the party at the picnic, which was otherwise composed of very youthful and irresponsible elements. Mr. Pole would as soon have thought of going to church as to eat cold viands in the open air with one's plate in one's lap. Indeed, he had no lap.

"You may talk of the spreading beech," he said, "but there is nothing so good as the Mahogany Tree."

"And nothing so bad as the Banyan," added Leonard Greene. His wit was rather thrown away at Masham, but in those days he could afford to be lavish of it.

The spot that all agreed upon was the most suitable for their *al fresco* repast was Swanborough Falls, a Niagara with a drop of about ten feet, and boasting only of a duodecimo volume of water; but in that part of the country objects that could be called picturesque were rare, and Swanborough Hill and Fall had quite a reputation with sight-seers.

On the former, as we have mentioned, science, assisted by the spirit of pecuniary speculation, had erected a camera, in which, during summer-time, visitors, for sixpence a head, had presented to them on a white table all objects in the vicinity, which they could see with their naked eyes for nothing had they remained outside. Dick had visited this establishment himself with Lucy, and paid the admission-fees for both out of his own pocket-money. The remembrance of it was in his mind as he took his place on the morning of the picnic in the Masham "break," a long open carriage, drawn by four horses and holding sixteen persons, with two grooms on flying seats, as though they were set there to take money at the door. Henry Pole was the "whip," and had a friend in the Plungers on the box with him.

Mr. Meredith had stopped at home to keep company with his host, and the occupants of the vehicle were, with the exception of Miss Latour, all young people—full of good-humor and high spirits. Dick was no whit behind the gayest of them in this respect; but his hilarity had no sympathy with theirs, for it arose from another source. He was a little anxious, too, as to how he should get the opportunity to slip away from his companions on the hill.

The water-fall was about half-way down it, and when the feast had been spread and eaten, and the servants were fallen to upon the *débris*, the company dispersed in various directions; some of the young men to sit and smoke upon the stones below the fall; others to wander over the hill, each with one of the opposite sex; and Miss Latour, like a hen whose chickens have ranged, to look after the proprieties as far as possible.

Dick himself stole away up the bed of the stream, hiding for a minute or two behind a big "boulder" when he heard Greene calling for him, and pursuing his way when the coast was clear. He felt pretty sure where he should find Lucy: on a rustic bench by the side of the little river, and just under the brow of the summit of the hill, and which was called, from its convenient seclusion, the Lover's Seat.

Nor was he mistaken in this hypothesis; Lucy was waiting for him on this very spot, which, as it happened, he had last visited in her company, and where he had spoiled his clasp-knife in carving her initials on the wooden bench. How

changed she looked from the Lucy of that date, and even from her he had parted with but a few weeks ago in Ford's Alley! She was really, perhaps, somewhat taller and more womanly, for change in that respect is, at her age, very rapid, but her air and manner were also far more confident and self-possessed than he had hitherto known them. She received him with her usual affection, and yet with a certain reserve for which he was at a loss to account.

"Why, Lucy, my darling, you don't seem half glad to see me!" cried he, reproachfully.

"But I am, Dick, very glad," she answered, "only I am doubtful whether it is right."

"Right? Why, what can there be wrong about it?"

"Well, to have written to you to appoint a meeting as I have done; and to deceive my aunt and mother about the trains."

"Well, we're obliged to do things in a hole-and-corner way, my darling. It's not our fault, but that of the people that drive us to it."

"You mean your father and my own relatives. That is not a pleasant thought for a girl, that all her people (for of course I don't count my step-father), and her lover's people too, are against her marriage. However, I am not quite the noodle I was, Dick. I think I see my way to something like independence. I shall not be a drag upon you in case you were cut off with a shilling, as my aunt says will be the case if you were to make me your wife."

"I mean to do that, Lucy, even if I hadn't the shilling."

"I know you do. You're as honest as the day, Dick; if you were not, I should not be here. But things will not be made easy for us."

"They won't be made easier by waiting, Lucy. When we are once married, we shall be safe. Of course there will be a precious row; but what people will feel" (it was significant that he avoided all direct allusion to his father) "is, that it's no use crying over spilt milk. And it's no use crying now, my darling: you'll spoil your pretty bonnet-strings. What a fine dress you have got on, by-the-bye, and how nice you look!"

"Do you think so, Dick? Well, folks say I have some taste."

She had a pork-pie hat on, with a bird-of-paradise sitting on the crest, a gown of bright blue silk, and purple gloves.

"In London one cannot dress, you know, so quietly as one does in the country. I am paid a salary now, and though there is not much to be got out of the choir business, I am beginning to feel my feet."

Dick glanced at her bronze boots, which made quite a sunshine in that shady place, and repeated "Feel your feet?"

"I mean that I am already making my own living, and hope to be in the way of doing much better before long. It is not for nothing, Dick, I do assure you, that I deny myself the pleasure of living at Durnton."

"I don't see how singing in a choir can be any good to you," grumbled Richard; "and I think you might think of me."

"That is what I am thinking of, Dick; that is why I leave you all alone at Durnton, and stay myself in Ford's Alley all this fine summer weather, though I feel sometimes like a bird in a cage, and as though I could sing nothing but

'Let me out, let me out!' It is all for your good, Dick."

"Oh, I dare say. That is what I was told when I was flogged at my first school; it is what is said generally by everybody who is going to do something unpleasant. I don't believe your living in Ford's Alley is for my good at all."

"My staying in London is for your good, Dick; that is, if your marrying me will be for your good."

"That it certainly will be," asserted Richard, precipitately; and with the idea, no doubt, of adding earnestness and solemnity to his asseveration he formally sealed it with a kiss.

"Be quiet, sir! You have had kisses enough. I say, Dick, it would never do for me to be at the spinney now, and your coming to see me twice a day, as I know you would do. People would begin to talk about us; and if once they did that, measures would be taken to separate us. You would have to go abroad at once, or step-father would be sent packing."

"Then you would come abroad, and marry me."

"No, I couldn't," said Lucy, in a tone that suggested the idea was not unpleasant, though impracticable; "one can't marry abroad without being engaged by the parents on each side, nor, I believe, without the consent of one's god-fathers and godmothers. There is no such thing as a love-match there, as ours will be, darling; will it not?"

"Certainly it will, my pet. I wish you wouldn't wear that bird in your hat, Lucy; its beak nearly put my eye out."

"Your eye had no business to be there, sir. Why don't you listen to me when I am talking so seriously to you, instead of doing such things?"

"I can listen best when I am quite close to a person's mouth," said Richard, with the gravity of one who is expounding a theory of acoustics.

"What I say is, Dick, have patience for a little and trust to me. The more I improve myself—"

"You can't, my darling."

"Hush—be quiet! The more I improve myself—"

"Do it at Durnton," broke in the incorrigible Dick. "You'll find improvement enough in my society."

"No; quite the contrary, sir. For the present I must stop in London."

If his was the more impatient spirit of the two, hers was the stronger. It was in a grumbling, but no longer in an antagonistic tone, that he inquired, "And how long are you going to take before you are Miss Perfection?"

"Oh, not so long, perhaps. I want you not to be ashamed of me; perhaps even some day to be proud of me."

"I shall never be ashamed of you, Lucy."

"That is because you love me; but others would be ashamed of me for your sake. I know there is a great difference—that is, in some respects—between me and Miss Pole, for example, and the other young ladies with whom you came from Masham this morning. I saw you all going up the hill together. I could not join them, Dick; I came after you, all alone."

There was a pathos in her tone which touched him. Of course, she would not have joined

them; and, of course, there was a difference. But how was that to be done away with by her remaining in London? He was not much of a judge of female attire, but it struck him that the pork-pie hat with the bird-of-paradise feather was a little *outré*, and that her dress generally would, on any other person but herself (who looked beautiful in everything), have been in bad taste. London certainly had not "improved" her in that respect.

"And now, Dick," she continued, "I must go. It has been a great comfort to see you, even for this little time. I have been thinking of nothing else since I got your letter."

"No more have I," said Dick, "since I got yours, darling."

"That was very good of you, because you have so many other pleasures. You are surrounded by your friends; while I— Well, no matter: this meeting will be pleasure enough for me for months to come. I shall not need this locket to remind me of your dear face. It will never be absent from my mind, just as it looks now."

There was a pause, during which the young gentleman might have been heard once more to murmur, "That bird will certainly put my eye out."

"You had better not come with me any farther, Dick."

"I will just see you to the top of the hill," he said.

There was nothing upon it but the camera, and even that without its usual exhibitor. So one more opportunity was offered for a farewell.

"You'll not forget me, Dick?"

Forget her! "If to dream by night, and think on her by day, was to forget her, then, indeed, were she forgot." If he didn't express his feelings in those terms, his meaning was identical with that of the poet; to his words, too, were added the appropriate action. Once more they embraced affectionately; and then she ran down the hill toward the railway-station, while he strolled leisurely in the direction of the fall, with the air of a gentleman who has been enjoying the picturesque.

Time had slipped away, however, more quickly than he thought. The spot where the picnic had been held was now deserted; nor could he find any of his party on the hill. He therefore hurried to the spot where the drag with its occupants already stood at the door. It really seemed as though, if he had not put in appearance at that moment, his friends would have started without him. "Halloo!" he said, "I had no idea it was so late."

On the road to Swanborough he had sat between Miss Pole and Miss Meredith; but he now found himself next the door, with Greene for his neighbor, and Miss Latour opposite to him, and looking like a graven image. Everybody was quite silent, and Henry Pole upon the box had a frown on his good-natured face as black as thunder. "By jingo!" thought Dick, "there must have been a row of some kind."

However, conversation was never his forte, and just now he had something very pleasant to think about; the vision of his Lucy was still before his eyes. "I hope the next time I see her," was his reflection, "she will not wear that infernal bird in her hat. Love is blind, but that is no reason why the lover should be made so."

At last the unwonted silence of the company began to force itself upon his attention. He put his hand to his mouth, and whispered behind it to his friend and neighbor, "I say, Greene, what has happened?" It struck him that one of the Plungers might have taken too much champagne and miscondacted himself, which would account for Henry Pole's evident annoyance.

"You ought to know," whispered Greene, grimly. "You've put your foot in it, I can tell you!"

"I? What the deuce do you mean?"

"Hush! don't talk about it. You're in Coventry, my dear fellow. It's compromising one's self to speak to you. You'll hear enough about it and to spare, when you get home."

CHAPTER XV.

BETRAYED BY SCIENCE.

SHORT as his life had been, Mr. Richard Talbot had been "in disgrace" once or twice before with various sections of society; but the present was perhaps the first occasion in which he could honestly feel that disgrace was unmerited. He had done absolutely nothing—*nothing*—to cause the obloquy that he now learned, for the first time, from Mr. Greene he had incurred from his companions in the break. If they had happened to see him in the gully, sitting side by side with his beloved Lucy, it might be possible, indeed—the young fellow blushed at the very notion of it—that his behavior might have been open to misconstruction. But he was perfectly confident—and it may be said at once that he was right—that neither in that situation, nor when he bade his charmer adieu, had he kept within range of human eyes.

For the rest of the journey, therefore, he enjoyed the exquisite luxury of a grievance—of suffering under an unjust charge, with the very nature of which he was unacquainted. As a selfish man, when he does go in for an act of self-denial, generally carries it out to extremity, so Dick played the rôle of injured innocence for the first time to perfection. He enjoyed it, as a low-comedian enjoys beyond measure some unexpected opportunity of sustaining the part of an archbishop or a king. A certain dignity sat upon him, which was at the same time mingled with great politeness. When the carriage stopped, he would not let the grooms hold back the door, but stood beside it with extended hand to assist Miss Latour in her descent.

To his amazement, she waived him aside with a lofty air, backed upon him, if we may say so of a movement that was at once deliberate and majestic, and handed her young ladies out with her own fingers. It was the very triumph of deportment.

Pale with passion, Dick rushed away to his own room, whither, as he felt sure would happen, his friend followed him on the instant.

"What the devil does it all mean, Greene? That old harridan" (it was thus he spoke of the domestic chaperon of the manor) "would not even let me touch the girls with the tips of my fingers. What have I done? There is some frightful mistake."

"If you can persuade folks of that, my dear

fellow," returned the other, quietly, "you ought to be made a queen's counsel upon the spot. You cannot deny that the sun shines."

"What has that to do with it?"

"Everything. If it had been a cloudy day—But there! If you were to dress in green and lie on the floor, and swear it, no one would believe in your innocence. Innocence is not your line, my dear Talbot."

"I don't say what is my line; the point is, what is my crime? I say again, what have I done?"

"I can only swear to what I saw you do."

"You saw me?"

"Yes, but that's nothing. I should have been shocked and saddened, of course; but I should have fondly hoped it would not have occurred again; only, unfortunately, Miss Latour saw you too."

"Confound her!"

"By all means; indeed, she was very considerably confounded, I do assure you. Miss Pole also saw you, Miss Meredith also saw you, Chandos and Plunger also saw you; and that was what made it so much worse. If we had been all men or all ladies, it would not have so much mattered; but unfortunately the company were of both sexes that saw you."

"Saw me *what*?" answered Dick, impatiently.

"Well, really, if you force me to say it," said Mr. Greene, demurely, "though I had much rather not talk of such things—" Here he took out his pocket-handkerchief and wiped his forehead, to express a delicate perturbation of the mind.

"I have done nothing to-day that I am ashamed of," said Dick, drawing himself up, and speaking with great dignity.

"I have not the least doubt of that, my dear fellow," answered the other, frankly; "but that doesn't prevent other people, especially the ladies, being ashamed of *you*. You shall hear how it happened from first to last. When we had done feeding at the water-fall, Miss Pole proposed a ramble over the hill, and of course we wanted you to come with us. I hallooed for you myself—only, as it happened, you were otherwise engaged."

"I was clambering up the gully," explained Richard.

"Just so; in search of the picturesque, no doubt; so were we. The natural beauties of that hill are very remarkable. On the top of it there is a camera."

"I know it," said Dick, impatiently.

"Then it's a pity you should have forgotten it at what I may venture to term a crisis. The whole party of us, the three ladies and the Plunger and I, after seeing what was to be seen from the top of the hill, thought we would go inside; I mean, inside the camera. The man charged sixpence apiece, and there was no reduction upon taking a quantity. That mattered little, however, because the Plunger paid, only it was a terrible squeeze. I heard Miss Latour whisper in the dark, that if she had known how these scientific matters were conducted, nothing would have induced her to venture on such an experiment. However, the light came in at last upon a round white table, on which we saw everything depicted *as large as life that we had seen outside. Only we were now obliged to look at them; it*

is impossible to ignore an object when it is the only one presented to our notice. What a beautiful tree! What exquisite furze blossoms! What a sweet cow! Then there came an object, indeed. You know how the servants dress at Windsor who give twopence to the Life Guardsmen to walk with them on a Sunday, and threepence if they take their arms. Well, presently we saw a girl dressed like that, only much more strikingly. She had a pork-pie hat, with a bird-of-paradise sitting on it as though it were its nest!"

"Oh, I see!" said poor Dick, with a piteous groan.

"So did we, unhappily; we all saw her."

"Here's a lark!" said the Plunger in my ear; 'she's got her lover with her.' And so she had; but he was not a Life Guardsman. He was about your height, my dear fellow."

"It was me," said Dick, with dignity. "I own it."

"It would not make much difference if you didn't," answered the other, coolly. "We saw you as plain as I see you now. We saw you kiss her."

"Well, and what then?" inquired Dick, savagely.

"I am sure I don't know. We didn't think of inquiring any further. We were quite shocked and horrified enough as it was. I thought I should have expired with laughter. 'There is nothing to laugh at, sir, in this infamous exhibition!' observed Miss Latour. 'My dear madam,' I gasped, 'I am not laughing; I am in hysterics.' What with the small room, and the warmth of it, and the tightness of his clothes, and the irresistible comedy of the scene, the poor Plunger was almost suffocated; he was quite purple when we were let out. But the ladies were scarlet with indignation. I heard Miss Latour say that your conduct was 'shameless,' and nobody who had any respect for herself would ever speak to you again. I could not utter a word in your defense, for if I had spoken I should have burst; but I do assure you it's no laughing matter. Miss Latour told Henry Pole, and— By the holy poker, here he is!"

There was a violent knock at the door, followed by the entrance of Pole in person.

He was a tall, handsome young fellow, remarkable for nothing but his good-nature and the never-ending delight he seemed to take in doing nothing; but on this occasion there were both purpose and irritation in his air and tone.

"I think you have behaved very badly to us, Richard," he began; "indeed, disgracefully."

"That is a hard word," said Dick, with an angry flush.

"Your conduct deserves hard words, sir. I am no saint myself, nor are the ladies of this household particularly prudish; but they have been insulted—there is no other name for it. How dare you, sir, carry on a vulgar flirtation under their very eyes in public?"

"In camera," suggested Mr. Greene.

"No, no, it was the ladies who were in the camera," continued the young squire, innocently.

"How the deuce was I to know that?" inquired Dick, naively.

"That has nothing to do with it. You should not have permitted the possibility of such an outrage to their feelings. You slip away from the

company of my sister and her friends, to go philandering with a young woman that you happen to meet on Swanborough Hill—"

"I didn't happen to meet her," said Dick, stoutly; "we met by appointment."

"The devil you did! Then all I can say is that a more impudent and blackguard thing I never heard of. Here's your friend here: I appeal to him—are you not of my opinion, Mr. Greene?"

"Well, really, Talbot," said "Pussy," thus appealed to, "if it was after you knew we were all going to the picnic that you made arrangements to meet that young person with the bird-of-paradise—"

"I will answer for my conduct to neither of you," put in Richard, calmly. "It is to your grandfather that I am accountable for my behavior, Mr. Pole; he is my host, not you."

"Begad, you had better not go to *him*," answered the young man, haughtily, "for he's got a touch of the gout on him; and if he does not lay a horsewhip about your shoulders, you may think yourself lucky."

"*What!*" exclaimed Richard, starting from the mantel-piece, on which he had been leaning with perhaps some affectation of unconcern.

"Come, come," said Greene, stepping between Pole and his friend, "don't let us talk about horsewhips. I know Talbot too well to believe things are quite so black against him as they look."

"Thank you, Greene," answered Dick, with feeling. "You are quite right in supposing I am not the blackguard this gentleman has been so good as to call me."

"I didn't call you a blackguard; though, if you were not under my grandfather's roof and an old friend of the family, I might have called you much worse. I said your conduct was blackguardly. I didn't see it myself; but you did, Greene."

Here Mr. Greene began to shake with inward mirth, which, however, as his face was very grave, was taken, let us hope, for an evidence of deep feeling. He nodded in acquiescence.

"Well, sir, you can't make your friend disbelieve his own eyes, I suppose."

"I could make my friend understand that I was perfectly justified in what I did," said Dick. He was very pale, but his tone was firm and resolute.

"What!" said Pole, "that you had any business to kiss that girl on the hill?"

"Yes, I could," answered Dick, curtly.

"I don't think it could have been business," murmured Mr. Greene; "it looked so much more like pleasure. Still, if Talbot has any explanation to offer—"

"I have an explanation, and, what is more, a complete justification," said Dick, "and I am going to give it in the proper quarter—to Mr. Pole." And with that he marched out of the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

OIL ON THE WATERS.

Dick's blood was up, and he felt equal to anything; but he had a little overrated his moral courage. On his way down-stairs he met Miss

Latour, and the manner in which she gathered up her skirts to avoid the contagion of his touch, and also cut him dead at the same moment, staggered him not a little. To venture into old Mr. Pole's sanctorum when he had got the gout upon him was also no trifling undertaking, even if he had been bound upon a more pleasant errand. That fine old English gentleman was not only "greatly respected," but (especially under the influence of his aristocratic malady) intensely feared. It was not necessary (and would have been very dangerous) to "scratch" him in order to find he was a Tartar; and being well acquainted with this circumstance, it was with a somewhat faltering hand that Mr. Richard Talbot knocked at his host's study door. "Come in, and be d—d to you!" was the invitation to his summons, and its tone was that of a ship captain's in a gale of wind.

Why the private apartment of the proprietor of Manor House was called a "study" is a question for etymologists. It had a little book-shelf, with the *Sporting Calendar* arranged in rows, and a baggammon-board with "Rapun's History" on the back of it; so far and no farther its connection with literature extended. On the walls hung a few illustrations of fox-hunting, with some lines from Somerville's "Chase" beneath them, which it is probable had never been read; and there ended art and poetry. Above the mantel-piece there were a fine collection of "cups," and one especial dog-whip, which its proprietor humorously (if somewhat sacrilegiously) termed "Simon the Tanner." Among these were arranged certain fox's brushes, with the date on which they had been obtained—mementos of the squire's palmy days, when he could procure horses up to his weight. The low-roofed room was otherwise without ornament; but it was substantially furnished and very snug, with an aroma of tobacco-smoke about it not unpleasant to the majority of the squire's friends, but with which the vassals of the estate too often learned to associate the county jail and its tread-mill; for the squire's study was also the court in which his after-dinner justice was administered to poachers and other rustic offenders. The present would not have been a good day for any culprit to have been brought before him, for he was sitting in his colossal arm-chair very uneasily, and with his foot swaddled in flannel, supported on a gout-rest of red baize. In his hand was "Tom and Bob's Life in London," a work in which he took an unwearied interest, and in the perusal of which he hated to be interrupted. Some people, especially the ladies, called him a "naughty man," and in accordance with that theory of his character pictured him in his solitude perusing French novels of an immoral tendency; but this was mere scandal. Mr. Pole had never learned French.

"Well, Master Dick, and what is *your* business?" inquired the old gentleman, with undisguised irritation.

"I am very sorry to disturb you," said the young gentleman, gently; "but something has happened to-day at once so serious and distressing—"

"*Not to the Aylesbury ducks!*" exclaimed the other, in a tone like the roar of a lioness who beheld her cubs in danger. "You don't mean to say the cook has kept them a day too long?"

"Not that I am aware of," replied Richard. "The matter I came to speak of is a personal one, and concerns myself only."

"All right," returned the old gentleman, with a sigh of relief. "Why the deuce did you put me out by looking so miserable? I thought something had happened of consequence."

"It concerns, however, my own honor, and the relation in which I stand to you and yours, Mr. Pole," observed Dick, with grave asperity.

"Very good. Just squeeze me that lemon, and open some soda-water, will you?" Dick obeyed, without protest, except what was conveyed by the expression of his face; it was impossible to begin discussing a delicate point of conduct while engaged in opening a bottle of soda-water, so he did that first.

"We had a picnic on Swanborough Hill today, sir, as you are probably aware."

"Of course I am. Precious set of fools you were, in my opinion, when you could have had your meals comfortably cooked at home. Just move my leg-rest half an inch nearer the fire. Steady! That's right."

"Sir, a very painful circumstance took place at that picnic. A young lady, in whom I feel the warmest interest, met me on the hill by appointment."

"Did she? Well, 'pon my life, you're beginning early!"

"But, sir, I am here to explain matters and excuse myself."

"Excuse yourself! Then she was not good-looking, I suppose. Well, at your age I was not particular myself. Just put that bit of flannel—gingerly!—over my foot, will you? It must be near dinner-time. You were saying something about a girl, but she was not pretty. That is like Tom and Bob here, without the illustrations—it interests nobody."

"But, sir, this young lady is very pretty. I never saw any one half so pretty, and she is also as good as gold."

"What do you mean? Has she got land in her own right. Oh, I see; you are referring to her moral qualities. Well, you met this pretty girl, who has moral qualities, by appointment on Swanborough Hill—and kissed her."

"Well, yes, sir, I did kiss her," admitted Dick. "It was on the top of the hill—"

"That was very wrong," interrupted the old gentleman. "There is a place in the gully, called the Lover's Walk, very much better fitted for that operation."

"I know, sir," said Dick, naively. "But I was wishing her good-bye; and there was nothing within sight but the camera-obscura."

"Well, go on. You are coming to something interesting at last, I hope. You took her into the camera-obscura?"

"No, sir; indeed I did not. But unhappily Miss Pole was there already."

"The devil she was! Who with?" roared the old gentleman.

"Well, sir, with Miss Latour, and Miss Meredith, and others. And unfortunately, though I could not see them, they could see me."

"What, on that little white table? They saw you billing and cooing—you and the young woman. Oh dear! pat me on the back, you scoundrel!" The old gentleman's huge frame shook with laughter, and he was purple in the face.

"Saw you billing and cooing. Oh dear! and Miss Latour too. It must have been quite a revelation to her. It is the best thing I have heard these many days."

"But, sir, they are very angry; and Miss Latour especially. The ladies consider that they have been insulted."

"And so they have, sir," broke in Mr. Pole, suddenly awaking to his responsibilities; "of course they have been insulted. How dare you insult the ladies of my family by courting this brazen-faced creature under their very eyes? If I wasn't stuck to my chair by this confounded gout—Dammee, I'll send for Henry to bring a horsewhip!" and he laid his hand upon the bell.

"One moment, Mr. Pole, before you disgrace me—and yourself—before all the world," cried Richard, desperately. "This brazen-faced creature, as you call her, is as honest a girl as breathes. I have known her all my life, and am engaged to be married to her. Nobody knows it but yourself; but I feel it due to you and the ladies to confess as much."

"Engaged to be married! You? Engaged to your grandmother! Why, you're only just out of the nursery! Who's the girl?"

"Her name is Lindon, sir."

"Lindon, Lindon; I never heard of it. Where does she live? Who is her father?"

"Her father is dead, sir. She lives in our parish. Her mother was my foster-mother."

"What! the woman that married that infernal poacher whom your father made his game-keeper? Then I must say he's properly served for it. So you are going to marry your father's game-keeper's step-daughter. You'll find that is among the 'forbidden degrees,' my young friend."

"I dare say there will be objection, sir," said Richard, firmly; "but I mean to do it."

"Do you, begad? Just ring that bell, will you? If you move a step, I'll throw my crutch at you. John, send Mr. Henry here."

"It is none of Henry's business, sir," pleaded Dick.

"Certainly not, but it's my business. I have not forgotten that I was your father's friend till he rattled from the course of good-fellowship and took up with his 'isms.' You shall not disgrace him by running away with a poacher's daughter from my house. If he has any sense left in him, he will send you out of the country till your step-father elect is hung."

"That would make no difference to me," said Richard, stolidly.

"I dare say not. If that girl were here I'd send her to jail for an attempt at kidnapping. Henry, here's Dick Talbot engaged to be married!"

The young man, who had hastened to obey his grandfather's summons, expecting to find that some catastrophe had happened, stared inquiringly from one to the other.

"What Mr. Pole says is quite true," said Dick, with dignity. "The young lady I met on the hill is my affianced bride."

Here the old gentleman began to shake again.

"What!" said Henry, "you are going to marry the girl with the peacock's feather in her hat?"

"It was not a peacock's feather," answered Richard, angrily; "and even if it was, that is no business of yours. I have made this explanation

for your sister's sake and for that of the other ladies. The matter is sufficiently painful to me as it is, without its subjecting me and the girl I love to insult."

"I sincerely beg your pardon, Talbot," cried Henry Pole; "but—" Here he caught sight of his grandfather's face, and its expression was too much for him. They roared together, like an old lion and a young one over some dainty morsel.

"I will not stay another hour under this roof!" cried Richard, turning majestically toward the door.

"Don't let him go alone," spluttered the old gentleman. "Get the dog-cart out, and drive him over to Durnton yourself, Henry. Never lose sight of him till you see him safe at the Tower. I'll write by post to his father."

"I will not run away," said Richard, quietly; "I am willing enough to go home."

This seemed, in fact, to poor Dick the best thing to be done. To stop at Masham, exposed to the ridicule of his young friends, was impossible: and it was better that his father should learn his views from his own lips than from Mr. Pole's version of them. He went up to his room at once and locked himself in, to pack his portmanteau; he would not even speak to his friend Greene.

While the dog-cart was being got ready, Henry Pole waited in the hall; through which presently sailed Miss Latour, in still majestic fashion, like a swan who has been ruffled by intrusion and can't forget it.

"So Mr. Talbot is going, I'm truly pleased to hear."

"Yes, he's going; but you're all of you quite wrong about him, and you, Miss Latour, in particular."

"What do you mean? It is a matter on which, unfortunately, there can be no mistake."

"I beg your pardon. It was only yesterday that you said he was not a marrying man."

"Why, you don't mean to say that—"

"Yes; he's engaged to the young lady with the eagle's plume—I mean, with the bird-of-paradise feather."

"Engaged! That boy engaged!"

"Hush! here he comes."

Miss Latour had been bound for the house-keeper's room, but she tacked at once and sailed off to the ladies' boudoir.

No engagement had ever caused such excitement at Masham Hall since the news had come of the battle of Waterloo. The ladies were at once reassured and horrified. In one sense, they had made a great fuss about nothing; though in another, the "nothing" assumed gigantic proportions. Mr. Greene stuck loyally to his friend. "I was quite sure," he said, "that Talbot could have done nothing unbecoming a gentleman."

"And yet," said Miss Latour, "appearances, you will allow, were much against the young man. We could not have done otherwise than exhibit our marked disapprobation."

"I suppose not," said Mr. Greene, "though it was like sending a fire-engine to put out an aurora borealis."

CHAPTER XVII.

STICKING TO IT.

It was not, as we know, the first time, nor yet the second, that Mr. Richard Talbot had come home in disgrace, when he drove up to the Tower with Henry Pole by his side, like a criminal in charge of a detective; and yet he felt less apprehension about the consequences of his misconduct on this occasion than he had ever done before. Hitherto he had not been able to persuade even himself that he had been undeserving of punishment, whereas he was now fortified by a sense of innocence. He was like a spendthrift, who has for once lent a guinea to some honest fellow, and finds himself in the proud position of a creditor. He had done nothing, as he kept repeating to himself, that he had need to be ashamed of; and moreover (and this, above all, gave him strength and confidence), what he had done he meant to stick to.

Henry Pole, though he hated "rows," had good-naturedly offered to stay the night at the Tower, and "see Dick through" the interview with his father. But the young gentleman had declined his services; so his friend just dropped him at the hall door, and then turned his horse's head toward home again.

"Why should I be afraid of the governor?" was Dick's reflection; "this row must have come sooner or later, and why not at once? Wild horses shall never tear me from Lucy's arms."

Perhaps he secretly imagined that he would be likely to get there all the earlier in case there should be a serious quarrel. If he was kicked out of house and home, for example, it would be only natural that he should repair to Ford's Alley. He did not, however, believe that matters would proceed to that extremity; and had some private doubts, even if they did, whether Miss Lindon would be ready upon the instant to link her fortunes with his own under such disadvantageous circumstances. He felt secure of her affection, but was also aware that she was no slave of impulse, but had behind her an indomitable will, and—that teak which makes the iron target so impregnable—a prudent disposition. Though her motto with respect to him was always "I love you," it had been ever supplemented with "Watch and wait." She trusted to time and to herself to help them, and would be strongly adverse, he knew, to any *coup de main*. In the discussion that was about to ensue, Mr. Talbot the elder little guessed how his own arguments were strengthened by the views of the very young lady who was the object of his hostility.

"Your father is in the library, Mr. Richard," said Rawden, in answer to Dick's inquiry.

"Alone?"

"Well, sir, he has only Mr. Freeman with him."

Mr. Rawden could scarcely believe his ears; but if he did not hear his young master exclaim "D—n Mr. Freeman!" as he ran in, he was the victim of an acoustic delusion.

The sentiment was incredible, but the expression remained distinct upon his tympanum. If the porter of the Vatican had let in one of the Pope's nephews, and heard him say "D—n the Pope!" his position would have been exactly analogous to that of Mr. Rawden. His exclamation of "Well, I never!" however inaccurate

grammatically, was strictly true. For although Mr. Freeman condemned other people in *future* both on Sundays and week-days, and that with no uncertain voice, no one in Durnton, and far less at the Tower, had ever ventured to thus anathematize Mr. Freeman.

Disgusted as Dick was not to find his father alone, he could not keep him in ignorance of his arrival, and, having once resolved to make a clean breast of it, he doubtless felt that the sooner it was done, the better, and therefore pushed on into the library. His father, as usual, had a huge tome of Divinity in his hand, to some passage in which he was directing the rector's attention. He looked up, aggrieved at the interruption.

"What, Richard! back so soon?" he said.

It was not a gracious speech, but the manner of his reception seemed to make what the young man had to tell more easy for him: a tone of tenderness would have gone far to melt his resolution.

"Yes, sir; I am come back."

"Tired of Masham already, eh?" said the rector, kindly. "That is scarcely complimentary to the young ladies."

"Mr. Pole has sent me home, father," stammered Dick.

"Not in disgrace, Richard, I hope, *again*?"

"No, sir; I have done nothing to be ashamed of; only—only—I am engaged to be married."

"To be *what*?" inquired Mr. Talbot, dropping his book upon the floor with a crash.

"He *said*, to be married," said the rector.

"Well, he's very young, of course, but I must say my wife foresaw it. 'You may depend upon it,' she said, 'that Richard will make a match of it with Margaret Pole.'"

"It is not Margaret Pole at all," observed the young man, with irritation; "it's Lucy Lindon."

The rector thought to himself, "My wife said he would do that too;" but this time he did not claim credit for her sagacity; he only murmured, "Then Dorothy was right, after all."

"And who on earth is Lucy Lindon?" inquired Mr. Talbot.

Dick did not reply, but fixed his eyes stolidly upon the carpet. He had overrated his courage.

"I am afraid," said the rector, answering for him, "that the young person of whom Richard speaks is Mrs. Parkes's daughter."

"I know no one called Parkes except my game-keeper and his wife," observed Mr. Talbot, coldly.

There was a very unpleasant silence.

"Am I to understand," continued Mr. Talbot, more icily than before, "that the object of your proposed engagement, Richard, is my game-keeper's daughter?"

"It is his step-daughter, sir," exclaimed Dick, with desperation. He had never comprehended the difficulties of his position until now: the unwonted silence of the rector, quite as much as the austere tones of his father, brought home to him the magnitude of his offense against society. "She is quite different from George, sir," he urged, "and not of his blood. She is a well-conducted and excellent young woman." (He did not dare to say "young lady;" and yet he felt that he was only giving the sort of good character that would be looked for in a housemaid—one that by no means fitted the bride-

elect of the heir of Talbot Tower.) "She is also very accomplished, sir, as my aunt Edith will bear witness."

"Your aunt Edith!" put in his father, quickly, at the same time shooting a meaning glance at the rector. "It is she who is at the bottom of this, then?"

"No, sir; it is not that. Only she knows about her talents, and has given her a situation in the choir of St. Ethelburga's."

"What do you think of *that*?" inquired Mr. Talbot of the rector.

Mr. Freeman shook his head and groaned. "It is all bad," was what his face said, "but this is the worst part of it."

Poor Richard, though such a castaway, had a heart not without gratitude.

"Indeed, sir, it is not Aunt Edith's fault—if fault there be," he said. "It is all my own doing. She has given me no encouragement in the matter; she has even kept Lucy in London, and given her employment, solely, as I believe, to keep her out of my way."

Mr. Talbot smiled a bitter smile. "First my father and then my son," he said, as though talking to himself.

Mr. Freeman nodded in adhesion. "That is characteristic of the Jesuit system," said he. "They will pursue their ends even to the third and fourth generation."

"I don't know what you mean," said Dick, who dimly recognized in the last remark a quotation from the Scriptures, and felt that things were growing more serious every moment. "I have loved Lucy ever since she was a child, and she has loved me; and of late I have felt that I cannot live without her, and—and—she cannot live without me."

"And upon what means do you propose to live together?" inquired Mr. Talbot, cynically. It was curious to see how the man of the world, which had been dead in him for so many years, had become suddenly resuscitated. "I suppose, however, your aunt Edith has promised to see to that."

"No, sir; she has promised nothing. Indeed, she knows nothing of—of our engagement."

"Supposing, for argument's sake, that is true, I ask again, how do you propose to live?"

Dick had about thirty shillings in his pocket, a handsome watch (thanks to we know whom), a gold pencil-case (which, however, dropped its leads), and a clasp-knife. Lucy would have two hundred pounds when she came of age, but that would not be for some years to come. These were their wretched assets.

"Well, sir, I ventured to hope that in course of time—I don't say at once" (this with the air of one who is prepared for compromise, ready to meet the other of the high contracting parties half-way)—"that we should secure your consent to our union."

"Did you? or did you not rather speculate upon gaining my forgiveness after you had disgraced yourself?" Here the rector whispered something in the speaker's ear. "I say, sir, did you not, in your ignorance and presumption, think of making this girl your wife clandestinely, being unaware that it is not permitted for a boy and girl, without the consent of their parents, to get married in this country?"

"Nor in any other," put in the rector, hastily,

who thought, perhaps, he saw a notion of crossing the Channel in Dick's despairing eyes.

"I was quite aware, sir, of the difficulties of my position," said Dick (to whom, however, to say the truth, this legal objection had not before occurred), "and had no intention such as you ascribe to me. I should not, I admit, have spoken to you of the matter for some time to come, but that I met Lucy at Swanborough to-day, and—and—by some who happened to witness that meeting my conduct was misconstrued. Then Mr. Pole said he would not be responsible for me, and sent me home."

"Did you meet this young person at Swanborough by appointment?" inquired Mr. Talbot.

"A very pertinent question," murmured the rector, nodding his head. ("His Dorothy herself," he thought, "could scarcely have put it better.")

"Yes, I did," said Richard, doggedly, gathering himself together for a final effort. The rector's manner irritated him more than that of his father alarmed him; he felt he was being treated as a child, and anger gave the spur to his courage. "I mean to marry her, sir: I have passed my word to do so; neither to-day, nor to-morrow perhaps, but some day. If you set your face against me, so much the worse for us; but that will make no difference as to the final result."

"That is your ultimatum, is it?" inquired Mr. Talbot, scornfully.

"It is what I wish to say, sir, though, I hope, without offense to you."

"And it is all you have to say? I don't mean to say that it is not quite enough; but you may possibly have something else to add—to fix the amount of your own allowance, for example."

"I have nothing else to add, sir," said Dick, scarlet with rage and shame.

"Then you had better go to bed. I will speak to you in the morning, when you are—sober."

Richard knew that his father did not mean that he was drunk, but only that when morning came he might take a less unreasonable view of matters. He felt that he had gained nothing, while he had covered himself with ridicule. The retreat which he had meditated, if the worst came to the worst (as it *had* come), namely, that idea of marrying Lucy straight off, and trusting to the chapter of accidents—was no longer open to him; he could not marry, it seemed, till he came of age, without his father's consent. Such was the oppressive and tyrannical condition of the British law. It was almost a comfort to him that his father appeared really angry; that, at least, gave a seriousness to his own intentions; whereas he had a horrible suspicion that the rector had been once or twice upon the verge of an explosion of mirth. He felt certain that in the smoking-room at Masham he was at that moment affording immense amusement. He called to mind how old Mr. Pole had roared at his honest frankness, and how his grandson had joined in that indecent exhibition of mirth. Even Greene had not stuck by him, as the claims of friendship demanded, notwithstanding also his own considerate behavior to that gentleman in the affair of Miss Meredith, who *really had* been something to laugh at. He had not looked for much sympathy; but it was hard lines, indeed, that his honorable intentions toward a virtuous

young woman should have made him a public laughing-stock. If his father had disinherited him upon the spot, and turned him out of house and home, it would have almost seemed preferable to his present position.

He threw open the window of his room, and gazed out into the summer night. Nature, at least, saw nothing ridiculous in the condition of his affairs, but was looking serenely calm and still. Afar off, above the last trees of the avenue, towered the old ruin, hallowed by his first kiss of love. Beneath it lay the spinney which embraced his Lucy's dwelling-place, to which he foresaw that she would never more be permitted to come. That would make no difference to him, except that her absence would be wretchedness indeed. He had promised her marriage, and he would never break his word to her.

Such were the noble terms in which his thoughts expressed themselves; but perhaps the truth was, that he had set his heart upon making the girl his wife, and he did not intend, come what might, to be thwarted in the matter. Like Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Mr. Richard Talbot could not "bide to be disappointed" even in small things; much more, then, in that which was the greatest desire of his life—namely, to marry Lucy Lindon.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A MIND DISEASED.

RICHARD TALBOT was mistaken in supposing that either his father or the rector regarded the communication that he had so unexpectedly made to them as a laughing matter. When the library door had closed behind him, the two men regarded one another for a while in silence, and with grave faces. The rector was the first to speak:

"This is an awkward business, my friend; but you must not lay it too much to heart. Richard is far too young to really know his own mind in such a matter."

"But why should he *have* a mind for such a thing?" interrupted the other, impatiently. "If he had met this girl elsewhere without knowing who she was, such an infatuation could have been pardoned; but a game-keeper's daughter! A girl out of my own village, where my position should have been a safeguard to her."

"Let us be thankful that it *was* a safeguard—at least in one sense," returned the rector, gravely. "The young man has behaved honorably, however mistaken he may have been. It is not every youth in his station who would have taken such a course. A virtuous attachment—"

"You are not a Talbot, Mr. Freeman," interrupted the other, quickly. "You do not understand, that when a family has kept itself for centuries free from any disgrace of this kind, how the mere thought of such a strain upon their 'scutcheon galls one."

"I understand that, my friend," answered the other, gently; "but you must forgive me for pointing out that such considerations have small weight indeed in the sight of Him with whom a thousand years are but as yesterday, compared with moral rectitude. This lad of yours might have done worse even than that which he threat-

ens to do, though the world would have thought lightly of it; and you, my friend, let us hope, are not of the world."

"The old man within me is stronger than I thought," replied the other, as though talking to himself. "What, indeed, are name and race compared with well-doing, or a few generations of an erring house with the eternity that awaits us all? How could it ever have come about, Freeman? There must have been neglect somewhere—want of supervision, blindness."

"Your son had no companions, Talbot. He has been left of necessity to his own resources, and such society as he has found for himself has not been always of an improving or edifying kind."

"You mean Parkes, I suppose," said Mr. Talbot, frowning. "I don't suppose my game-keeper taught my son to fall in love. I see another hand in that matter—more subtle and more dangerous."

"I think it very likely, my friend; but, to use your own argument, not even a Jesuit could persuade a young man to give his affections where he had no mind to place them, though he—or she—might have fostered such an attachment when it was once formed."

"She *has* fostered it, of course; that is certain. He would never have been so resolute, had he not been conscious of having backers."

"Your son said that he had none, however; and I think him truthful."

"Edith has deceived him, of course; she has promised nothing with her tongue, but everything by her manner. I was stern enough with him just now, but I feel that it would be dangerous to push matters too far."

"I think it would be very dangerous. We must trust to time."

"Yes, Freeman, but I cannot wait. There is no time for me. The man who speaks to you is on the threshold of eternity."

"My good friend, that is what we all are—"

"No, no, I don't mean that," interrupted the other, impatiently. "I should never have spoken of the matter but for this. I am a dying man, Freeman."

"A dying man!" repeated the other, incredulously.

"Yes; I have had warnings—not spiritual ones, which our fallen nature may misconstrue; but physical signs, which there can be no mistaking."

"A man is a bad judge of his own health, my friend."

"When he wishes to live—or not to live; but not when, as in my case, he says 'Heaven's will be done.' You are thinking that I look well and strong enough. So dies the oak by the lodge gate, with its heart nigh eaten away. I have lain in this room unconscious for hours, twice within the last three months—cold as a stone. This new trouble has, I feel, already done me mischief."

"You astound and distress me beyond all measure, Talbot!"

"That is folly. How often have you told your flock that to live is loss, to die is gain!"

"It is a blessed thing to have a mind at ease, no doubt, when the gates of death seem open."

"Yes, but mine is not at ease."

"My friend!"

Even Lady Earnshaw would have forbore to call the rector "hypocrite" as he uttered those words. His face exhibited the extremes of astonishment and distress. That this "chosen vessel" and his own familiar friend, Francis Talbot, should thus confess to a doubt of his own spiritual security, was a blow indeed.

"I cannot talk of this matter now, Freeman," answered the other, in a changed tone. "Suffice it for the present to say that my time is short; that it behooves me to keep my soul unvexed by temporal troubles. This matter of my son's must be settled, if it be possible, as soon as may be. Death has terrors of its own enough; let me not have to feel in my last hour, that so soon as I am gone Richard will make this girl his wife; that she will be mistress here in the home of my fathers; that my name, my race—" Here there was silence. Mr. Talbot had fallen back in his chair like a thing of lead, and the color of his face was as lead likewise. Yet even as nerve failed him, he made a signal with his hand, which his companion rightly interpreted to mean that his condition was to be kept secret. The rector eased his cravat, threw water in his face, and let the cool night air play freely on it through the open window. He felt the responsibility of not calling assistance, but his friend's will was as law unto him in all personal matters. Presently these simple remedies had their effect. The livid pallor of the patient's face changed slowly to a more healthy hue, and he presently uttered a deep sigh.

"It is the third time," he murmured—"the third time."

"You are doing a grievous wrong to yourself and others, Talbot," said the rector, gently, "if you do not take advice for this."

"I am more than forty, my friend, and you know the proverb," answered the other, with a feeble smile. "Doctors can do nothing for me. It is borne in upon me that the fourth time will be fatal."

It would have been easy for most persons to have combated this gloomy view, but for the rector it was difficult: when things were "borne in" upon men like Mr. Talbot and himself, he had always allowed that they had a force far beyond that of mere presentiment. Nevertheless, he did essay to look on the bright side of matters.

"You are a young man still, Talbot, with many years, I trust, of usefulness before you. At all events, it is God who measures our days."

"He has measured mine," answered the other, quietly. "Pray say nothing of this to any one. I shall not be sorry that it has occurred in your presence, if it convinces you of the necessity of settling this unhappy affair of Richard's as soon as may be—" He paused, and for the moment his companion feared, from the sharp pinch and pain of his thin lips, that there was about to be a relapse. "Thank you, I am quite myself again now, Freeman. Listen. One of us two must go up to town at once and see this girl."

The rector bowed in acquiescence.

"I suppose, so far as authority goes," continued Mr. Talbot, "I am the better envoy; but I am not used to deal with—with any of my fellow-creatures; and there is, besides, the chance of meeting with Edith. The girl may be dwelling under her protection, for what I know."

"She is living in Ford's Alley, at a Children's

Home, which is maintained by your sister. That has been admitted by Mrs. Parkes."

"Ah! then it is as I suspected. Well, you will go there, Freeman. You will know what to say and what to do. Perhaps money will be wanted."

"Probably; indeed, I should think certainly."

"Then do not spare it."

"The girl's mother and her step-father are at hand, remember, Talbot. Of course, they are abetting her, but it might be made worth their while to take the contrary course."

"That can be considered afterward, if necessary. No stone must be left unturned to put a stop to this mad scheme; but if the girl herself can be brought to see the wickedness and folly of her designs, that will weigh most with Richard. He must not be left to his own resources, either, here at Durnton. There is some friend of his at Masham."

"Leonard Greene."

"Ay; I will ask him to the Tower."

"That will be a good plan. And now that matters are in train for remedying this mischief, do not let it disturb you."

The rector rose and held out his hand.

"Come, let me see you to your room."

"I shall do well enough, Freeman."

"Indeed, I hope so. These attacks proceed sometimes from disturbance of the mind quite as much as from ailment of the body."

"You are right there."

He paused, as the rector thought, in doubt whether to pursue that subject; but presently added, "Well, you will be off in the morning. A thousand thanks. Good-night, and Heaven bless you!"

Left alone, he took to walking up and down the room, as was his wont, and uttering his thoughts aloud. "The mind," he said; "ay, so it is. Who can minister to a mind diseased? Yet, why diseased? for I was surely right. Heaven knows I sought not my own profit. Nor was it even for my son's sake—my son, my only son—to wed a poacher's daughter! If I die, he'll do it. Can this be retribution? No, no, no! Yet why have I never put it to Freeman? Because when one is right, one wants no adviser. What did Richard say the other day about right? That one always knows what it is: only to do it, one must do it at once. He is a mere child, and prattles like a child. And yet he thinks of marriage, and such a marriage! This is a sore trial: to be struck through him; always through him, poor lad! Yes, if one was not sure—quite sure—one would say it was retribution!"

CHAPTER XIX.

TOBACCO AND A WIFE.

THE rector had gone home from the Tower with a mind almost staggering under its unwonted burden. The escapade of Richard, the illness of the squire, the journey that he himself had promised to undertake in the cause of his friend, were subjects each of which would have been sufficient to give him food for reflection. As it was, his intellectual powers suffered from plethora; they had had more given to them

than they could digest. The rector's consciousness of this fact added yet another source of mental disquietude. If these things disagreed with him, how would they affect the constitution of his good lady? That was the way he put it even to himself, being both a gentleman and a Christian; but what he meant was, how would it affect her *temper*—a piece of moral mechanism which required very delicate handling? This excellent man had, of course, no secrets from his good lady; that was well understood between them. But, on the other hand, his friend had enjoined silence upon him respecting the serious condition of his health; and his heart was loyal toward his friend. There might have been some embarrassment in the situation to an individual less bent upon doing good, and especially on doing no harm, to his fellow-creatures.

To tell his wife all that he had learned himself—she being of such a sensitive, not to say excitable, disposition—would be clearly hurtful to her. There was but little news stirring, as a rule, at Durnton. In winter-time there was an occasional wreck on that part of the coast, but in summer the days went on without an event; a young woman would be promoted from the village school to service; a young man would show "signs of grace" by attending the week-day lecture, or signs of the other thing by going to sleep in the church gallery on the Sabbath; the postman would get drunk at fair-time, and leave the letters promiscuously—which stirred up a good deal of scandal (for, without being absolutely inquisitive, one must stop somewhere, and such an opportunity of reading other people's correspondence was not to be neglected); there would be sometimes a breeze in the Book Club, some members of which had a carnal taste for novels, and whose endeavors to introduce that pestilent description of literature had to be combated à l'outrance. But, except for these excitements, the wheel of life went very smoothly at Durnton. To hear that an earthquake was rocking the church, or that Swanborough Hill had broken out as a volcano, would have been hardly less shocking news to an inhabitant of this quiet village than what the rector had got in his budget—that the son and heir of the Talbots had engaged himself to the daughter of his father's game-keeper. And if this was so in the case of an ordinary recipient, what would it be to Mrs. Freeman? who had so long had her own views about "that man Parkes," and his wife, and the "young person," his daughter, who, "without good looks, had that sort of attractiveness about her which is unhappily found to be 'taking' with the male sex." The rector felt sure that he had quite as much news to tell his wife as would be good for her to hear, without saying anything about Mr. Talbot's state of health.

Mrs. Freeman was a lady of moderate height, but of imposing proportions. Mr. Pole had so far forgotten his fine old country manners on one occasion as to describe her as "that stout and stumpy parson's wife down at Durnton." She had not an angle about her except at the tip of her tongue, which could be, and indeed was at times, exceedingly sharp. Upon this occasion, however, she received her husband graciously enough, for he was earlier at home than usual. His friend was always loath to let him leave the

Tower now, for solitude had become unwelcome to him.

"Well, Giles, for once I shall have some one with whom to exchange a word or two. It would be well for Mr. Talbot if he always retired to rest at such a reasonable hour: you don't smell of smoke, either, as usual."

"He is not gone to rest, poor fellow!" returned the rector, without noticing this last remark. He had been too full of thought to smoke as usual upon his way home, but he began to feel the want of tobacco: he felt that he could explain matters to his wife so much more easily if he had a pipe in his mouth. The virtues of smoking are infinite: among other things, it conceals the features when exposed to too strict a scrutiny; imparts the appearance, at least, of deep reflection, and gives one time to mature one's replies before delivering them.

"What do you mean, Giles? Has anything happened to trouble Mr. Talbot? What is it? I am sure something has happened."

"Well, yes, there has: something so serious that I don't even like to talk about it. Richard has come home suddenly."

"Richard? What, from Masham?"

"Yes." The rector pulled out his tobacco-pouch, and began to turn it about in his fingers abstractedly.

"Now, don't fiddle!" exclaimed his lady, emphatically. "Just tell me what has happened."

"Well, it is a long story," sighed the rector, "and I am a little put out and flurried." He slowly emptied the contents of his pocket upon the table—among them his pipe-case. "I think I could go into the whole matter better— But there, I suppose it would hurt the curtains."

"You may smoke one pipe, if you like: only do go on, Frank."

"So I will, my dear, if you will give me time." He filled his pipe and lit it, while his wife fidgeted upon her chair, and in her excitement absolutely forgot to cough as usual, and protest she was half choked with his nasty tobacco.

"Well, Richard has come home from Masham; indeed, was brought home by Henry Pole."

"Intoxicated!" exclaimed Mrs. Freeman, triumphantly. "I thought as much: with such low companions as he is permitted to mix with in the village—"

"No, my dear, not intoxicated," put in the rector; "or, at least, not in a material sense. In another, indeed, he may be almost said to be so. He has engaged himself to be married."

"Didn't I say so!" ejaculated Mrs. Freeman, more triumphantly even than before. "It is to Margaret Pole, of course. Well, it's early days; but I felt it must happen sooner or later. The squire is delighted, of course?"

Mrs. Freeman's eloquence was so voluble that the stream of it could not easily be arrested, unless by her own volition. When she put a question, it was as though she had dropped a flood-gate. Then, and not till then, her would-be interlocutor had a chance.

"No, my dear; it's not Miss Pole on whom Richard has fixed his affections. I wish it were."

"You don't mean to tell me it's Miss Meredith? Well, I never breathed the idea to anybody, but I have had a sort of presentiment all along that this would happen. Those masculine, horsey girls are very often as deep as those who

look as if butter would not melt in their mouths. I hope Mr. Talbot will never consent to his son's marriage with a girl who goes a-hunting. That she should give up that sort of thing should be a *sine quâ non*. You urged that, Giles, I do hope?"

"I should have urged it, my dear Dorothea," observed the rector, quietly pulling at his pipe, "but the opportunity never offered itself. Miss Meredith, with all her faults, would have been infinitely preferable to the unhappy, and, indeed, disgraceful—"

"Good heavens!"

"Yes, my dear, it is worse than anything you can imagine; though I should not say that, for, indeed, your own sagacity has before now foreshadowed the possibility of such an entanglement."

Mrs. Freeman nodded, and a fleeting smile passed across her eager face; of course, she had foreseen it all along, whatever it was; only she had not the least suspicion, as yet, as to *what* it was.

"My dear Dorothea, it's Lucy Lindon."

"What? Impossible!" Such was the force of this unexpected shock that speech for the moment failed her. "Well!" she continued, after a long pause, "this comes of neglecting good advice. It was obvious to everybody, except the person whose business it was to see it, that that boy's visits at the spinney could have but one end. Thank Heaven, I did my duty, so far as I was permitted, in pointing out the danger to Mr. Talbot! This is what comes of putting a premium on dishonesty, and on not coming to church on Sundays. What does he think of his favorite, Mr. George Parkes, now? Not that it was the man who had the chief hand in this; it was that woman—Annie Lindon that was. She has been laying the train for years, and has now applied the match, and the thing has gone off with a vengeance."

The rector had not been a very attentive listener to this harangue, for he could guess what it would consist of, and from long experience was a pretty good judge of when he could give his mind to other things while his wife was holding forth. On this occasion he had to mature some plan for breaking to the lady his next communication—namely, the necessity of his going up to London. The words "match" and "gone off" had, however, attracted his attention.

"Things are not quite so bad as you imagine," said he; "though they are very bad."

"I should like to know how they could be worse?"

"Well, the lad is safe at the Tower, and the girl is in town. They met the other day at Swanborough, however, by appointment."

"The hussy! The deep, designing, abominable hussy!"

"Nay, my dear, it was Richard's fault; it was he, as I understand, who made the appointment."

"Richard!" echoed the lady, with withering scorn. "Is it possible, Mr. Freeman, that you believe that?"

"The boy said so himself, my dear, at all events."

"Said so! What of that? She told him to say so, of course. If she had said so *herself*, you would not, I suppose, have believed her, and why

should you believe her at second-hand? Well, we shall get rid of her at Durnton now, and of her mother, and of that scoundrel, her step-father, though I don't think him half so bad as the women of his family. The squire's eyes are opened at last, I suppose, and these wretches will have to go."

"Nay, it would be injudicious to push matters to such extremities: the lad is very headstrong, and it is just possible he might go with them."

"What! make a gypsy marriage, and live with her in a cart in the woods? What folly!"

"Of course it would be folly, my dear Dorothea; but, then, young men are given to folly. No. Our wiser course, as the squire thinks, and I certainly agree with him, is, if possible, to detach this young woman's affections—"

"Affections!" put in Mrs. Freeman, sharply. "Let us talk common-sense, I beg! In plain English, you mean to try to buy her off."

"Well, really—if you put it that way—but I should rather say we shall endeavor to convince her that her interests and her obvious duty lie in the same direction."

"Ah! you flatter yourself you'll make it worth her while to give him up. You'll find that a hard nut to crack, I promise you."

"You think, then, that she really loves him?" said the rector, with undisguised surprise.

"On the contrary, I am confident she doesn't care twopence about him," answered the lady, curtly; "but she knows on which side her bread is buttered, and to that side she will stick."

"But what course would you recommend to us, my dear?"

"Stringent measures. The spinney cottage is the squire's, and he should give Parkes and his wife notice to quit: the man, of course, has only his wages to live upon, and nobody but Mr. Talbot is weak enough to employ him. Then offer them a hundred pounds to leave the country, taking the girl with them. She is cunning enough, no doubt, and would make her objections, but it is her mother who pulls the strings."

The rector took out his note-book. "You are generally right, my dear, and, at all events, your suggestions are always noteworthy. If our plan fails, we will certainly try yours."

"Our plan?" echoed the lady, with a slight acidity of tone, and manifesting some symptoms of congelation—the first frosty fret of the rivulet. "I have not yet heard your plan."

"Well, as I have said, the squire has made up his mind, in the first instance, to see what can be done with the girl herself. She is in town at present."

"Oh, he's going up to town, is he?"

"Well, no, dear; he is not. He is so upset by this misfortune that he feels quite unequal to such a surprise: he has asked me to undertake the matter for him."

"Oh, indeed! And what did you say?"

Mrs. Freeman would have folded her arms if her contour would have permitted it; as it was, she clasped her hands above her waist and paused for a reply. Her husband knew that this air and attitude boded mischief—it was the hoisting of the domestic Fitz-Roy drum, that prophesied not only squalls, but a tornado.

"Well, my love, I resolved to take your opinion upon the matter before giving a positive an-

swer. The girl, it is true, however unworthy may be her conduct, is a member of my flock, and, so far, I should have authority to appeal to her. As the clergyman of her parish—"

"Stuff and nonsense!" put in his companion, decisively. "Clergymen are like all other men, when they have to deal with these designing creatures, who happen to be also of an attractive appearance. This is essentially a matter that lies within a woman's province. I will go up to town, Giles, and deal with this young person myself."

If it had not been for his faithful pipe, the Rev. Giles Freeman would have here found himself at his wits' end. He was well convinced that if his worthy lady and Lucy Lindon met there would be a battle royal; and though he had every confidence in his Dorothea getting the best of it, a victory would in this case have been as fatal to the cause he had in view as a defeat. It was not by anathemas and crushing sarcasms that this young lady was to be conquered, but by politic treatment and material arguments.

"Your idea would be admirable, my dear Dorothea, had we to deal with this girl alone; but, unfortunately, there is a serious complication. She is at this moment under the personal protection of Miss Talbot."

Mrs. Freeman's countenance fell: if she stood in fear of any woman upon earth, it was of that quiet creature in the gray robe of a Sister of Charity. The robe was hateful to her as though it had been the scarlet garment of the Lady of Babylon herself, but she did not fear that any more than the bull fears a red rag. It was not Sister Edith's spiritual faith that produced any feeling of alarm, or sense of inferiority, in the rector's wife; for she thought her a poor benighted creature for entertaining it. It was the lady's temporal position that subdued her. Mrs. Freeman would have defied the Vatican, and had not, perhaps, an excess of reverence for the Bench of Bishops; but for "a county family" she had a respect that bordered upon awe; and the Talbots had held the Tower from a time when even the Poles of Masham had never been heard of. When face to face with "a lady of the land"—one who had had ancestors that had been indigent to the same spot for centuries—Mrs. Freeman never felt upon equal terms: her feelings resembled those of a low-caste Hindoo in the presence of some sacred personage of her own race; her natural instinct was to abase herself before her, and she did it. With the lords of acres—the men—she did not feel this tendency to prostration; and, indeed, as we have seen in the case of Mr. Talbot, she could set herself up in opposition to them. But the women were "taboo." In their presence she could not lift a finger, except, as it were, deferentially to hold up the skirts of their raiment; and, of all women, Miss Talbot was the most "taboo" to Mrs. Freeman. Only twice in her life had she been in her company; and on both those occasions under what might be termed favorable circumstances; that is, they had met at the Tower, where she herself was considered at least a friend of the family, while Edith was held as a secret foe. And yet the latter had, in her quiet way, carried everything before her; and on the rector's wife attempting some slight resistance, had, as the slang of the day would term it, "jumped upon her;" or, rather, she had seemed to walk in

her stately way right through her, and come out at the other side—the winning side. She had neither done nor said anything of an insulting character; but her superiority of position had been as clearly established as though she had rung the bell and the other had answered it. Mrs. Freeman had not had the pluck to answer *her*, but by her silence had admitted herself vanquished. On the second occasion of their meeting, she had not ventured to contend with Edith Talbot at all.

It was certainly, therefore, far from Mrs. Freeman's desire to go up to Gresham Street, where, as she believed, Lucy Lindon was residing, and do battle not only with the squire's sister, but with another high-caste woman, Lady Earnshaw; but, on the other hand, she had a natural inclination to assert her prerogative; and also, perhaps, a secret reluctance to expose her excellent spouse to the machinations of such a designing minx as the game-keeper's daughter had proved herself to be.

"Why should we not *both* go up to town, Giles?" inquired she. "We could then be of mutual assistance to one another in this matter. You could bring Lucy away from Miss Talbot's roof—which you could not, of course, do were I not at the hotel to receive her—and then I could give her a good talking to."

"That would be an excellent plan," said the rector, gravely, "and I need not say would be the one I should select, had I the choice; but the staying at a hotel is an expensive matter; and though, of course, Mr. Talbot would defray the charge of one of us, we could hardly expect him to pay for two."

Far be it from us to suppose that the Rev. Giles Freeman could stoop to actual deception; but he certainly did exhibit on this occasion that cunning of the serpent which it is enjoined upon us to link with the harmlessness of the dove. He knew in his heart, not only that Lucy was not in Gresham Street, but that the squire would not have hesitated to pay the expenses of ten people instead of two, if the object he had in view could be thereby furthered. But he felt that it would not be furthered by his Dorothea's presence in London, and that he was therefore justified in using all lawful means to prevent her accompanying him thither. That simple consideration of expense settled the matter; for the rector's wife, with all her faults, had a due regard for domestic economy, and entertained no such passion for spending her husband's money, no matter at what inconvenience to him, that some ladies of far higher pretensions are wont to exhibit. But it is a question if the Rev. Giles Freeman would have ever thought of this argument had it not been for his pipe. Under cover of its friendly cloud, he had concealed his fears and matured his wits: it had suggested to him, first, Miss Talbot's presence, and secondly, the hotel bill; and now it whispered to him that, having gained his point, he had better hold his tongue. If he had lived in classic times, his piety would certainly have compelled him to acknowledge his obligations to the god of tobacco. As it was, he heaved a gentle sigh of relief, and, while his spouse looked out what was necessary for *him to take in his portmanteau* (for he was to *start the next morning by the early train*), emitted great clouds of incense, and blessed his stars.

CHAPTER XX.

THE RECTOR'S ARGUMENTS.

THE rector started for town from Durnton without another interview with the squire. He knew what he had to do, and was empowered to do it, and nothing more could come out of mere talk about the matter. Moreover, time pressed. It was essential that Richard should have no opportunity of communicating with the object of his affections by letter or any other means. Mr. Freeman quite understood the importance of his mission, but thought himself fully competent to accomplish it. He remembered to have seen Lucy of late about the village, looking very graceful and handsome, but on account of her step-father's bad character, he had had but little to say to her. She did not come to church very regularly; and though her mother went thither, that did not win her way to the good graces of Mrs. Freeman; and even clergymen, as that lady has observed (though to illustrate another subject) are but men, and are considerably influenced by their wives. He had, in fact, studiously kept himself aloof from the spinney cottage and its tenants. On the other hand, he remembered Lucy Lindon well, as she had been a year or two ago, the brightest and comeliest girl in his village school, a little prone to insubordination and idleness, but by no means a difficult child to manage if you went the right way with her, which was the way of kindness. As she was then—in disposition, at all events—he pictured her to himself now; and he did not think it would be a very difficult matter for him to persuade her what would be for her own good, or, at all events, what would be a very serious evil both to herself and him she professed to love, and probably did love.

Mr. Freeman by no means shared his wife's opinions respecting Lucy. Without supposing her to be disinterested in her attachment to the squire's son, he thought there might be a good deal of genuine regard in it. He knew that neither men nor women are often schemers in their youth, and, being a male himself, he understood that the ill-behavior of these young people was not all on one side—or, at all events, on the girl's side. A paternal air, a firm but kind manner, and some indisputable logic, would, he felt sure, set matters straight. He was pleased to think he could be of service to his friend the squire; but otherwise—and whatever his good lady might think—he looked forward with no agreeable anticipation to this visit to town.

He had not been in London for many years; and though he had at one time made his mark there—if a reputation with a single congregation can be called anything more than a scratch—he was well aware that all record of it had long vanished. A preacher, be he ever so earnest, has no more enduring fame than an actor, of whom the second generation after that which applauded him to the skies has absolutely no knowledge. And even at the date of Mr. Freeman's departure from the metropolitan stage, his authority was on the wane, and he had begun to find himself deserted by his followers, albeit for conscience' sake. In a graphic life-story of our own time, we have been told of a once-famous writer who bore with philosophic calm the world's neglect: how she, who had been lauded by the

public voice as only second to Shakspeare's self, survived to find herself among a race who had never read a line of her productions, and yet possessed her soul in peace and patience. But it is not every one who has the gentle spirit of Joanna Baillie. The decadence of her fame, too, must have been gradual, which was not the case with the rector of Durnton. He was still a power in the country—a beacon and a shining light amidst the spiritual darkness of the Eastern Counties; and to come to town was to place himself under an extinguisher: he was put out at once. This may seem a small thing to so genuine a man; but he had been a popular preacher—of all earthly callings the one which most tickles our self-esteem—and he felt it.

He drove from the railway-station to an old-fashioned hotel in the Strand, with which he had some acquaintance—a gloomy establishment, the windows of which began half-way up the wall, so that you could not look out of them from your chair; upon which ground, perhaps, it was that it was so strongly recommended, in the advertisement, to country visitors as being so “home-like.” As long as they sat still, they might easily imagine themselves at their native Bullock Smithy, or, still better, on account of the muffled roar without, at Pargate-super-mud. The people who frequented it were mostly of the country class: they snatched a fearful joy from the pantomimes at Christmas-time, and apologized to the hall-porter when they came in after eleven o'clock at night. They were very respectable people, and had plenty of money, but they were always in fear for the amount of their bill. It was a relief to them when they got it, and found they could pay it without selling out their property in the Funds. The proprietor, who thoroughly understood his clients, was agreeably affable; but the waiters were crusty, and the rooms were fusty to that extent that even the food, which was good enough in its way, though very plain, seemed musty. The coffee-room in which Mr. Freeman took his chop at mid-day was not a cheerful spot, and the *Times*, as usual, was “in hand.” There was nothing to attract the eye but the playbills of the various theatres which hung on the wall; to some, no doubt, they promised enjoyment, but to the good rector they only suggested the depravities of the town.

After his frugal meal, he started in a cab for the Children's Home in Ford's Alley. It agreeably surprised him that there was nothing in the exterior of that humble establishment that savored of the errors of Rome; for though he knew that it was the dwelling-house of Robert Parkes's sister, he thought that she might have been installed in some monastic office, with Sister Edith for her lady prioress, to the end that each captured child might the more surely be made a proselyte. It was one of these castaways—thus foredoomed to misery in both worlds—who opened the door to him, she having one little arm to do it with quite hale and strong (albeit the other was withered), and replied, in answer to his inquiries, that Mistress Parkes was above-stairs.

With one foot on the bottom step, he paused, arrested by a burst of harmony. The rector was musical; it was a material sacrifice to him to have to set his face, from conscientious motives, against choral services and other papistical pranks

of the like kind in church. They were snares of the devil, he knew; but he confessed to their immense attractions. Even here, upon this dangerous ground, overshadowed by the spiritual presence of the Scarlet Woman, it seemed to him that there was an angel in the house discoursing celestial music. Low, and sweet, and clear, the harmony seemed to ravish his very soul. He had heard nothing like it for beauty, though it was of so infinitely different a kind, since he had attended the Ely festival, and listened to the “Messiah” in the cathedral, which on a weekday had seemed permissible to him. When it ceased, he stood spellbound, and ere he began to ascend the stairs, there broke forth a different but still more entrancing sound, which once more rooted him to the spot. What he had first heard were the dying strains of a flute, fresh, silver-clear, yet gentle as the ripple of a brook; and now there broke forth a stream of vocal melody, impetuous, as though a Nile had burst its banks and overflowed—but without one turbid wave—some thirsting vale. It seemed to fill the house, and all the air around, as the blithe bird, who carols out of sight upon the wings of morning, fills the sky with song. The words escaped his ears, but whether sacred or profane, the voice that thrilled them seemed divine to him. Not till it had ceased, and the last cadence had died away, like the whisper of a “god in pain,” did the rector dare to place his heavy foot upon the wooden stair. At the sound of it, there was a quick movement of other feet on the floor above him, and a door opened, throwing light on the narrow and dusky way.

It seemed strange, after so harmonious a reception, to come upon the form that met him on the landing—a stunted, withered creature, looking more like elf than angel, with a face all wrinkles, and with tufts of hair above her bright black eyes that looked like snow with fire beneath them. On seeing the rector they at once, however, lost their keen and somewhat angry glance; it was plain they expected some other and less welcome visitor.

“What is your business, sir?” inquired she, somewhat curtly; then, as he came into the room, and she noticed his clerical attire, she added, in softened tones, “I beg your pardon, sir; you are from St. Ethelburga's?”

“Indeed I am not,” returned the visitor, with some asperity. “I have no connection with that—ahem!—institution whatever.”

The little woman nodded sharply, like a bird, and motioned, with a listening and somewhat hostile air, for him to proceed.

“You are Susan Parkes, I believe. I am come to see your niece, Lucy Lindon, upon particular and private business.”

“She is my niece, as you say, sir,” replied the little woman, dryly, “and, being so, I am fully competent to hear anything you have to say to her, on her behalf.”

“This matter, however, is for her private ear. My name is Freeman, and I am the rector of Durnton Regis.”

“A thousand pardons, sir; pray take a seat.” The little woman's countenance, still grave, had become all respect and courtesy. She was about to leave the room, when the rector stopped her.

“One moment,” he said. “That is a handsome flute I see upon the table—indeed, a mag-

nificent one, yet not unworthy of the sounds it has just uttered. May I ask who played it?"

"Well, sir, it was me."

"You?" Mr. Freeman was always courteous, even to the poorest (unless they "flew in his face" in regard to spiritual matters), but he here exhibited a surprise that bordered on incredulity. The little woman, however, was far from being displeased at this, for she felt that his doubts were a compliment to her art.

"Yes, sir; I play a little. It is a thing that has been a great delight and solace to me for many years."

"You play marvellously well. And the singing—it was not you also who sung?"

"Oh no, sir; that was Lucy."

The rector opened his mouth so wide that he might have been about to sing himself.

"Dear me! And Lucy Lindon sings like that! We never thought of her so highly when she was in our village choir, though, to be sure, that was some time ago."

"It is teaching as has done it, sir; developed the organ, as Mr. Hopkins says—that's the choir-master at St. Ethelburga's. To my mind, it is more like a bird's voice than a girl's; I seem to be in the country on the downland, where I was reared, whenever I hear it. And the country seems the only proper place for a bird and a girl."

The rector glanced suspiciously at the speaker. Was it possible that this was a hint of hers that her niece had better go home to Durrton—which was the very thing he had come up to town to prevent—or was it merely the general proposition that it seemed to be?

"It matters little as to where one lives," said he, gravely, "if one only leads a good life. The country has its temptations as well as the town."

"No, sir, not for a girl like our Lucy," returned the little woman, confidently. "Others may have as pretty a face, and even as sweet a voice (though I can hardly believe it), and no harm need come of it, if they are of a contented mind; but Lucy is proud and masterful, and her heart so set on making her way in the world—"

"Ah," interrupted the rector, mechanically; "that is where girls like her make their mistake. In seeking to rise, they sometimes take the very road to fall."

"Excuse me, sir, but Lucy is not of that sort," observed the other, dryly. "She wishes to be independent of everybody, and to make her own living, that's all; as if I grudged her what little I can do for her, or as if Miss Talbot was not willing as well as able to assist her!"

"Just so," put in the rector, "and she has other friends, also, of whom perhaps she does not guess. I am come here on their behalf, Susan Parkes, and they think quite as you do in this matter. You may be sure that I shall have no advice to give to Lucy but what a right-minded, sensible woman like yourself will approve of; only what I have to say is of a private nature, and I must needs see her alone."

The little woman nodded in quiet acquiescence, and then knocked at an inner door. "Lucy, here is Mr. Freeman, from Durrton, come to see you."

Here some wooden implement, probably a hair-brush, fell on the floor in the next room, and it was by no means immediately that the girl's voice

was heard in reply: "I will come directly, aunt."

"She is evidently taken by surprise," thought the rector, "and probably a good deal frightened. My task will therefore be all the easier."

As Susan Parkes left the room, the inner door opened, and Lucy Lindon presented herself. He knew, of course, that it was she, or else he would hardly have recognized the girl he had seen a few weeks before in his own village. It was not only that she had taken that step from girlhood to womanhood which is always somewhat sharply defined in girls with a character of their own, but her beauty seemed to have received some marvellous accession. Her hazel eyes were larger and more lustrous; her form more rounded and imposing; her very hair, in its soft, nut-brown waves, looked like a crown upon a queen. There was nothing in her attire to suggest much change in her social position, yet he almost felt that he ought to address her no more as Lucy, but as Miss Lindon. As it was, he held out his hand (which he had not intended to do), and said, "How are you, Lucy?" in a tone which, though quite parental, was by no means so severe as his wife would have recommended.

"How are you, sir?" returned she, quietly. A more keen observer would perhaps have detected an effort in the quietness, but to the rector she seemed, as he afterward expressed it, "as cool as a cucumber." "I hope nothing is wrong with mother?"

"Your mother is well enough, Lucy," he answered. "It is not on her account that I am come up to see you, but on your own."

"Pray take a chair," said the young woman. He noticed that her voice had suddenly grown hard and metallic, and at the sound of it that expectation of an easy victory over her with which he had flattered himself seemed somehow to die away.

"I came here on behalf of Mr. Talbot, Lucy, who is much distressed and troubled by a certain matter which has come to his knowledge respecting his son Richard—and you."

The color rose high into her cheeks, and her shapely head trembled ever so little, like a flower upon its stem, but she answered not a word.

"Of course," he went on, "it is but a boyish fancy. The idea of Richard's entertaining a serious passion at his age for any woman—even were she a fit object for it in other respects—is ridiculous, and would have to be put a stop to in any case; but that he should set his affections upon a girl in your position—however natural it may be for you to inspire affection in any man" (this little compliment was wrung from him in spite of himself, as much as suggested by his desire to keep her in good-humor)—"is a circumstance to be deprecated indeed, and—and—not to be thought of seriously, in short, for a single instant."

"Then why have you come up to town about it, Mr. Freeman?" inquired Lucy, coldly.

"Well, because Mr. Talbot wishes the matter to be put an end to with as little fuss and trouble as may be. His desire is to spare you pain, and Richard pain. I am here to appeal, against mere passion, to your better feelings. You can scarcely have considered this matter in all its bearings, Lucy, or you would never, I think, have encouraged—well, permitted—this lad to pay his

attentions to you. For consider, he is the son of your father's master—of the man through whom you derive your bread—"

"George Parkes is not my father," observed Lucy, scornfully.

"Nay, that is hair-splitting; he is your step-father—the husband of your mother—and Mr. Talbot is his employer. I think that circumstance alone should have prevented any right-minded girl, with self-respect—which, I see, you have plenty of—from accepting the attentions of his son."

"I did not seek for them, sir," said Lucy, quietly, and with a touch of softness. "We were thrown very much together, as you know; and we have always loved one another."

"Well, well; that is natural enough. To childhood all differences of rank are unknown; but you are now a young woman, and cannot pretend to be ignorant of such distinctions. Now, suppose for one moment—though I tell you at once that such an event is absolutely impossible, and for the next four years even legally so—suppose you should succeed in persuading this young man to disobey his father, to disregard the warnings of all his friends, and to marry you. Well, you would exile him at once from the society to which he has been accustomed, and drag him down to a lower level. This would happen even if his father should forgive him, and furnish him with the means (which he would certainly never do) of living like a gentleman. A man cannot live like a gentleman who has married beneath him."

Here Lucy's hazel eyes lost all their softness, and, in a colder voice even than before, she answered, "That is your view, of course, Mr. Freeman, but it is not what everybody thinks. There are other things of some account in the world besides good blood and money. It is just possible in time that even the son of Mr. Talbot, of Talbot Tower, may not be ashamed to call me his wife."

"I don't say he would be ashamed, in a moral sense, Lucy; but it is impossible that you can ever become his equal. Ah!—your singing," exclaimed the rector, as the conviction of what she put her trust in flashed upon him; "if you think to rise in the social scale by any such accomplishment, you are much mistaken. You may become notorious, though even that is difficult, but that would make you in no respect more fit for Richard's wife, and, indeed, even less fit. I adjure you not to deceive yourself. I am taking it for granted that you have a real regard for the lad; that you are actuated by no mere selfish or mercenary motives, such as are certain to be imputed to you by others (and for which I should have thought your high spirit would have itself prevented you from giving occasion); I am appealing to your kind and honest heart to save this boy from the consequences of his father's anger, which would be social ruin, because I believe it capable of self-sacrifice."

He paused, and Lucy sat in silence. It was clear that she was deeply moved. The color had left her cheeks; the light of scorn and ire had fled from her eyes. Perhaps if he had left her to herself she would have done all he asked of her. But the *cacoethes loquendi*—that fatal weakness of the pulpit—compelled the rector to add something more.

"You will do me the justice to say, Lucy, that

I have abstained from all threat or menace. I have put the matter on the ground of good-feeling solely. But, of course, there are material issues. The immediate effect of your declining to give Richard up would be that your mother and her husband would have to leave Durnton. All possible channels of communication between this lad and you would have at once to be guarded against. You would, therefore, be the cause—and your own conscience will tell you whether the innocent cause—of the breaking up of your home and the ruin of your family; for if Mr. Talbot should turn off your step-father, who would employ him?"

The girl made a scornful gesture with her hand.

"I think I could insure him the pittance he receives as a game-keeper, Mr. Freeman, if that were all."

The rector's last mine had failed, and it was plain had done damage to the cause of the engineer.

"But it is *not* all, Lucy. It is a very small consideration compared with others."

"I know it," said she, quietly; "but it is, at all events, disposed of. What does Dick say?"

"Dick! You have no right to call him Dick," exclaimed the rector, with irritation. "And what does it matter what Dick says? He is a boy—a child; whereas you, if not his senior in years, are a woman grown. I am afraid I must needs alter my opinion of you if you persist in using your influence to his hurt. The law itself, as I have said, protects him—I mean, forbids his marriage without parental consent for the next four years. Do you intend, throughout that time, to harass his poor father, and unsettle the boy himself at a period when it is essential that his mind should be given to study?"

"I intend to take no advantage of any one, Mr. Freeman," answered the girl, steadily. "I wish to be fair and honest, but also true to Richard. I will not unsettle him, as you call it, by going to Durnton."

"But you will perhaps go to Swanborough, where you have met him already, and caused a public scandal," observed the rector, severely. "You will be surprised to hear, perhaps, that Mr. Pole has declined to keep him as his guest at Masham, because of your late interview."

"What had that to do with *him*?" inquired the girl, sharply.

"Well, simply this: it only shows how ignorant you are of how the world regards such matters. The ladies of the family, as I understand, resented your meeting with Richard at the picnic. Of course you meant no harm, but you see harm has been done. I know it was not your fault, yet a grievous fault has been committed."

Lucy rose from her seat, and, drawing herself up to her full height, regarded her companion with a look of fixed and fiery scorn.

"I care nothing for Mr. Pole or his ladies, nor for you, nor for Mr. Talbot," she said, "but I do care for Richard. If he wishes to give me back my troth—for it's true that we are engaged to one another—let him do so. I will make no appeal against it. But I must hear it from his own lips, or read it in his own hand. Let Mr. Pole and his ladies be ashamed of me if they will. That is nothing, unless Richard is ashamed of me."

"One moment, Lucy; you are permitting passion to get the better of you. Listen to reason. It is absolutely certain that a marriage between Richard Talbot and yourself can never take place. It is the mere dream of two children. But since he regards you with affection, and you reciprocate it in honesty and honor, we acknowledge the bond. If you were dead, for example, you would be dear to us because Richard loved you; and you *are* dead, believe me, so far as any possibility of your becoming his wife is concerned."

"I don't know what you mean, sir," said Lucy, coldly; "I only know that I am at present alive."

The rector knew what he meant quite well, only felt a natural embarrassment in expressing it; still it had to be expressed, for it was the last arrow in his quiver.

"I mean," he said, "supposing you to act generously and unselfishly in this matter, that Mr. Talbot will consider himself under a heavy obligation to you; and whatever assistance you may require for the furtherance of any calling you may have in view, or for any other purpose, will be given you, now and always, without stint."

"Then you have come here to bribe me, sir!" cried the girl, with concentrated passion. He held his hand up in remonstrance, but she motioned it away with scorn. "Pshaw! that is what it comes to, say what you will. You are a clergyman; but Mr. Talbot has sent you to me as a lawyer. You may tell him that you have failed in your errand. I have no more to say either to him or you. Good-morning, sir." And with that she withdrew into the room from which she had come out, and slammed and locked the door behind her.

If Lucy Lindon's exit from the rector's presence had been a little stagy—especially as respects the locking of the door—it had been undoubtedly effective. She had put a summary end to the conference; for though Mr. Freeman would have stooped to a good deal in hopes of recovering his lost ground, he could not stoop to urge a new stream of argument through a key-hole. He felt himself checkmated, and in such marvellously few moves that it resembled "fool's mate."

Whatever respect, however, he might have entertained for his late adversary's intelligence had been gained at the expense of his good opinion of her. It now seemed to him that the judgment his wife had passed upon the girl—"a deep, designing hussy"—had been a correct one, and, moreover, that she was grievously wanting in reverence. All compromise with this young person was evidently at an end, and severe measures would have at once to be taken. There was little doubt that she was being backed up by her own people in a desperate attempt to marry the heir of Talbot Tower out of hand. Under these circumstances, it was with a look of cold disfavor that he met Susan Parkes in the room below, on his way out.

"I hope, sir, Lucy has done nothing to anger you?" said the little woman, simply.

"She has done everything to anger me, and to injure her character, madam, in the sight of every right-minded person," was his indignant reply.

"Those are hard words, Mr. Freeman, to ap-

ply to a fatherless girl. Lucy is headstrong and opinionated, but there is no real harm in her."

"There is a great deal of harm in her; but I will take care that she shall only harm herself—and those who abet her. Your niece, Susan Parkes, you may take my word for it, will come to no good."

"Perhaps you will kindly tell me why, sir."

"I shall do nothing of the sort, for I believe you to be fully acquainted with her ill-doing."

"I know of no ill-doing of Lucy's, sir; and, as her aunt and guardian, I think I have a right to ask—"

"I shall waste no more words in this house; I—"

He had his hand upon the door, when it was opened from without, and Sister Edith, in her garment of gray, presented herself to his astonished view. With a grave inclination of the head, he was about to pass by her without speaking, when the voice of Susan Parkes arrested him.

"Miss Talbot, this is Mr. Freeman, from Durnton, who has just made a serious charge against my niece Lucy's character, the nature of which he refuses to explain to me. Perhaps he will explain it to you."

With Susan Parkes behind him, with Sister Edith before him, and the door closed at the back of her, the Rev. Giles Freeman most decidedly wished himself home at Durnton, and even entertained a somewhat pusillanimous regret that he had not brought his Dorothea to town with him.

"I have no claim to any explanation, Susan, from Mr. Freeman," answered Sister Edith, after a slight pause; "but I do think that you have a right to ask for it. The girl is beneath your roof and under your protection."

"I have been given to understand, Miss Talbot, that she was under yours," observed the rector, dryly. The poor man felt his situation to be desperate, and, like a rat in a corner, he showed his teeth.

"You have been misinformed, Mr. Freeman," answered Sister Edith, quietly. "Lucy Lindon has a talent for singing, which I thought it a pity she should not cultivate; and therefore I have given her a little help in that way."

"Then you are quite unaware that she has entangled the affections of your nephew Richard?"

The color rushed violently into Edith's pale face. "I knew nothing of any entanglement, Mr. Freeman; but I did have some suspicion that she had attracted Richard's attentions. Indeed, as Susan here will bear me witness, it was to prevent (as I hoped) the possibility of further mischief that I offered certain inducements to Lucy to stay in town."

"Yes, sir; this is how it was, Mr. Freeman;" put in the little woman, who had noticed the look of incredulity that had crossed the visitor's face; "it came to my knowledge that Master Richard had given Lucy a locket, which had also his portrait in it; and though we thought nothing serious of the matter, Miss Talbot and I agreed that it was better that Lucy should not return to Durnton."

"She did return, however, last Wednesday," remarked the rector.

"Only for the day, sir, to fetch her clothes; and we knew that Master Richard was away from home."

"You did not know, then, that he met the girl that day, by appointment, on Swanborough Hill?"

"Oh, Mr. Freeman!" cried Sister Edith, clasping her thin hands, "can this be true?"

Her tone was one of such manifest distress and pain that the rector could not doubt her ignorance of the event in question, and also her regret at it; but, then, she might regret it as having hastened matters before her jesuitical plans were ripe. There is nothing like a difference in theological opinion for the suggestion of a motive.

"It is certainly true, madam. It took place when Richard was at Mr. Pole's house, who, in consequence, has sent him home. Your brother is beyond measure annoyed and troubled about the matter. I came here to-day to reason with the girl; but I find her so resolute to pursue her end that I am obliged to suppose that she is conscious of having backers in this business."

"Backers!" ejaculated Edith. "Is it possible, Mr. Freeman, that you impute to me any share in such an outrageous scheme?"

"If I may say so without discourtesy, madam, I confess that such has been my suspicion. My own views in the matter are of no moment, however, but they are also Mr. Talbot's views."

"What!" exclaimed Sister Edith, with indignation. "Does Francis—my own brother—imagine that I, being cognizant of the attachment of his son to Lucy, encouraged it? Or do you, a clergyman, think it becoming your sacred office to entertain so vile a suspicion of your friend's sister? What object could I have in view? what gain? What satisfaction could I derive from bringing about such an ill-assorted union? Is it possible that you think it would have given me pleasure to cause Francis distress of mind? or to see the boy I love beyond all earthly objects of affection take a step so ill judged and irremediable as to marry Lucy Lindon?"

"No, madam—no. I trust neither your brother nor myself were so uncharitable. But we did think that there might be influences—I need not particularize them—brought to bear upon you from without; that there might be some scheme on the part of others to aid and abet the lad in his foolish passion, so that they might acquire authority, or rather power, over him, to be used eventually to their own purposes."

"Upon my oath as a Christian, upon my honor as a woman, there was no such scheme, Mr. Freeman. I bear no ill-will to Francis; and I would lay down my life—were it mine to dispose of—to save his son from harm."

"That assurance is amply sufficient for me, Miss Talbot, and, I trust, will be so for your brother. But the deed is more convincing than the word. Will you use your influence with the girl, and at least exact a promise that she will abstain from importuning your nephew, and leave him free to follow the dictates of filial duty?"

"I will do that at once," assented the other, eagerly; then, after a moment's reflection, added, "And if you will kindly give me your address in town, I will let you know the result of my endeavors."

Though the rector felt his cheeks burn at this unmistakable suggestion that he should take his leave, he was conscious that he had deserved ill at Sister Edith's hands. Although a fanatic, and a very violent one, he had none of the personal

malevolence of the partisan. He had the honesty to confess to himself that he had done Miss Talbot wrong in supposing her to have aided and abetted Lucy Lindon in her designs on Richard. But even yet he did not do Sister Edith justice; for it was really from no feeling of displeasure that Edith dismissed him, but simply because she felt that his presence at "The Home" would be a cause of irritation to Lucy, and would make her less disposed to listen to reason. She had a strong conviction that the rector had gone quite the wrong way to work in his interview with the girl; that he had trusted to threats and menaces, instead of appealing to her better feelings and sense of right. She had not that confidence in her superior "tact" in dealing with one of her own sex which most women would have entertained, but she thought she possessed a certain authority (not her own) which was wanting to the rector, and to which she felt that Lucy must needs yield obedience.

CHAPTER XXI.

TWO WOMEN.

"I AM deeply grieved, Miss Edith," said Susan Parkes, as soon as the rector had taken his departure, "I am more sorry than words can say, that Lucy has repaid your kindness in this manner. I had no idea that she had allowed her folly to go such lengths. Though, at the same time, one should remember—to be just—that it was Master Richard who made the appointment of which Mr. Freeman speaks."

"I know it, Susan," interrupted Miss Talbot, gently. "I do not wish, Heaven knows, to defend my nephew at the expense of your niece. My intention is to act for the good of both of them; only to do so, I must know all the facts. I acquit you, of course, of having had any hand in this unfortunate affair; but if you have any knowledge of it, pray impart it to me. It is necessary, in dealing with the girl, that I should know exactly how the matter stands."

"I know nothing, Miss Edith, except that Master Richard wrote to her from Eton, and when he came to town gave her a locket with his portrait in it."

"With his portrait! And her mother knew of that?"

"Yes, ma'am, she did. But I don't think Annie had aught to do with bringing them together down at Swanborough."

"And your brother?"

"Miss Edith, you know George," returned the little woman, plaintively. "I cannot say whether he has had a finger in this pie or not: how could I?"

"To be sure; I understand that. Please convince yourself that I wish to spare you and not pain you, Susan; only I must know all I can. Lucy is a good girl, so far as I have seen; but then with me she has always been upon her good behavior. I don't know what she is really like."

"Well, ma'am, she is a good girl. She has faults, of course—is very masterful and independent, and thinks she can take care of herself, when it would be much better to trust to her natural guardians and protectors."

"Do you mean that she has made undesirable acquaintances?" inquired Sister Edith.

"Yes; that is just what they are—not downright bad, but undesirable."

"Men or women?"

"Men. I am not sure, but I think offers have been made to her—"

"Offers?"

"Yes, Miss Edith: nothing to be ashamed of, as she will tell you; but professional offers on account of her singing in the choir. Offers to bring her out on the stage."

"The stage, on account of her singing in the choir! Oh, Susan!"

"Yes, Miss Edith. When Mr. Freeman called to-day, I almost feared he was come on some such errand. They wear black clothes and white cravats, you see—these gentry—just like the clergy," said Susan, simply.

"Impossible!" thought Sister Edith; and, indeed, though theatrical managers are, in their habits, often eccentric, none of them, to my knowledge, has ever appeared before the public in a straight waistcoat of silk, with an apron to match, and a baretta—which was the professional costume, for example, of the Rev. Gerald Vane.

"I think, Susan, you might have told me something of this before."

"Well, I did think of it, Miss Edith; but, in the first place, it was not for me to decry my own niece, who, moreover, was doing nothing absolutely amiss; and in the second place, since you had been so kind about her voice and that, I hardly liked to tell you that the very pains you had taken with her had been the cause of bringing her into undesirable notice. You see, folks began to go to the church to hear her singing—and perhaps even to look at her pretty face—who would never have gone for a better purpose."

"I see," answered the other, scornfully. The ways of wickedness were not unknown to Sister Edith: though they shocked her moral sense, they did not surprise her. Her conscience, moreover, pricked her because it had not been out of regard for the girl's own interests, but those of Richard, that she had thus, though unwittingly, placed her in the way of temptation; and perhaps she would have confessed as much, but that that would have been tantamount to an admission that things at St. Ethelburga's were not always as they ought to be—a supposition to be smothered in its birth. She had acted for the best, of course; but it now seemed that it had not been for the girl's best. She felt that she owed her reparation, or, if that debt could not be paid, as was but too likely, some equivalent for it; and it was with a very different frame of mind from that with which Mr. Freeman had set about his mission, that, after hearing from Susan that her niece was at home and alone, Sister Edith took her way up-stairs.

As Lucy was not in the sitting-room, her visitor tapped softly at her bedroom door. Her first summons was unheard, but the second produced a faint "Come in!" and Miss Talbot entered accordingly. Lucy had evidently taken it for granted that it was her aunt who sought admittance, for she did not even turn her head; but, seated at her little toilet-table, continued to fix her eyes upon some object before her. This was not her

own face, as it might well have been, unless the attraction of beauty is to be denied to its possessor alone; but the face of another—that of a bright-eyed, olive-cheeked boy, set in a heart of gold. She looked up into the mirror, and, seeing her visitor portrayed in it, shut the locket with a startled cry; but Sister Edith had already recognized the portrait of her nephew.

"This is my own room, Miss Talbot," exclaimed the girl, rising to her feet, her cheeks scarlet with rage and shame; "you have no right to come prying here."

"Gently, gently, Lucy," returned Sister Edith, with dignity. "I knocked at your door, and you admitted me, and I could not help seeing what you hold in your hand. It matters little, since that is the very subject upon which I am come to speak with you."

"I have already been spoken to about that," answered Lucy, defiantly; "and I have no answer to give other than that which I have already given to Mr. Freeman."

"I have nothing to do with what you said to Mr. Freeman. It is true that he had a right to be answered; but I am Richard's near relative, and have therefore a still greater right. What will give me still more authority, if you have a real regard for him, is this—that I love him more than any other human creature."

The girl's face softened at once.

"If that is so, Miss Talbot, you will not be so hard upon me as others are inclined to be, since he loves me."

"There is no harm in that," said Sister Edith, slowly, "since we should all love one another; and you and Richard have been thrown together from your childhood. But if you have an intention to become his wife, there would be great harm, Lucy?"

"Why, madam?"

"Well, surely, you do not need to ask me why. Would it be right, would it not be fitting, for a young man in his position to marry a girl in yours? Has your bringing-up been such as to fit you for such an alliance? Nay, more, is not such an ambition on your part directly contrary to the authority of the Church, which teaches us to be content with that station in life to which God has called us?"

"The Church is nothing to me, Miss Talbot."

"My dear Lucy, you know not what you say! Are the laws of the Creator, then, nothing to you, nor the book of his laws, nor the ministers of his will?"

"All that has nothing to do with me and Richard, Miss Talbot."

"Pardon me, but they have. They have to do with every act of our lives, but especially with so important a one as that which you contemplate. You are not yourself, Lucy, or you would never say such things; and you would call me Sister Edith, as you are wont to do at St. Ethelburga's, and not Miss Talbot."

"I do not feel to you as though you were Sister Edith," answered the girl, coldly. "It is only an hypocrisy to call yourself so. I will tell you the real reason why you are trying all you can to interfere with me and Richard: you may call it by what name you like, but it is pride. If you were really my sister, you would have no objections. But now, because I dare to love your nephew, all the talk that I have heard from you,

and the preachings from Mr. Vane, about fellow-creatures and fellow-sinners, and an equality in the sight of Heaven, turns out to be mere moon-shine."

"Oh, Lucy, think, think of what you are saying! I don't mean as respects myself—you are attacking the most sacred things."

"And is not love a sacred thing?" answered the girl, quickly. "Do you suppose that anything Father Vane, as he calls himself, can say in his pulpit, or that you can say, or that the Bible itself can say, for the matter of that, is more sacred—that is, to me" (she struck her breast impetuously) "than my own heart's love? What would life be, say you, without your faith? What would life be, say I, without my love? There is equality there, at all events. Nay, matters are even worse for me than you; for if your faith prove false, you would take no harm from having believed; but if my love prove false, I should suffer for having entertained it."

She spoke with force as well as passion; and, notwithstanding the shock which her feelings experienced, Edith could not help admitting to herself that this girl was no ordinary character; but possessed, it was likely enough, those very talents for the stage for which it seemed some had already given her credit. She was not angry with the girl at all; supreme and divine pity for one so fair and young, and so dangerously gifted, took possession of her.

"Dear Lucy," said she, "you are following false lights held by evil hands, which will, unless God has mercy on you, lead you to destruction. You are a child in years, and more childish than any child—though, I fear, not so guileless—in entertaining such wild thoughts. I will not speak with you to-day about their wickedness, for you are not in a state of mind to hear me: but they are simply impracticable and out of the question."

"That is what Mr. Freeman said," answered the girl, coldly; "your way has been more roundabout than his, but you have come out at the same door at last. You want me to give up Richard."

"I want you to give yourself up, to save him."

"That is honestly spoken, at all events," said Lucy, bitterly. "I am not to think of myself at all, then?"

"You would not do so if you really loved him, Lucy. I was supposing that you really loved him when I asked the sacrifice. I will not even say, what I am nevertheless well convinced of, that your giving him up is as essential to your own happiness as it is to his. I will speak of his interests only. Richard is a mere lad, and a few weeks ago was a boy at school. He has seen little of the world, and nothing of the women in it except yourself. You were very beautiful; you were very fond of him; what was more likely, what was more certain, than that he should fall in love with you? I will marry him, you say, before he has a chance of comparing me with girls of his own rank in life: at present he does not detect any deficiencies; let him find them out when I have got him safe, and it is too late for him to repent his choice. Mind, I do not accuse you of mercenary motives: I believe you to be above them; you wish to marry him, doubtless, because you love him; and you believe that he has a genuine love for you—only you have secret doubts about its lasting."

"I have no doubt," said Lucy, faintly: "that is, of course, much of what you say is true."

"Good girl! Be honest; be true," said Edith, encouragingly. "Don't fear to tell me all."

"Well, then, I will tell you that you are wrong about my wishing, or, at all events, about my determination, to make him safe, as you call it. I could make him safe to-morrow—or, at least, in a few weeks' time—though Mr. Freeman said I couldn't."

"What? You could marry Richard—boy as he is—without his father's consent?"

"Yes, I could. I have been told how to do it, and I could."

"Who told you?"

"That has nothing to do with the matter. Richard has only to come up to town, and, after three weeks of residence in some out-of-the-way parish in the city, we could be married, and nobody be any the wiser."

Sister Edith fairly shivered with horror.

"That must be at some dreadful Register Office, which is as bad as no marriage at all; and even in that I think you must be mistaken, Lucy."

"Oh, no; there is no mistake," answered the girl, with a confidence that was almost scornful; "and it would not be at the Register Office at all, but all in the regular way by banns in church."

"But you are not going to do this, Lucy?" pleaded Sister Edith, subdued by the force of circumstances, and also not a little impressed by the air and manner of this mistress of the situation. She had expected to have to deal with a mere village girl, whose head had been turned by flatterers for their own purposes, and who would probably prove as pliable in her hands as she had done in theirs. And, lo! here was a young woman of such a practical turn of mind that she had been studying the marriage laws of the land, or, what was more likely, had been instructed in them by some one more worldly-wise and crafty than herself. Such was not her mother's character: but her step-father, George Parkes, Edith knew to be a man of great audacity, and not unlikely to have suggested to the girl the readiest means of securing her young lover for life.

"No, I am not going to do it, Miss Edith," answered Lucy, slowly. "If I was, I should not have spoken to you of the matter, you may be sure. Only please to tell them down at Durnton that I am not going to be threatened or worried by any one; and I won't have Richard bullied. Let us fight fair, if we must fight. I will take no advantage of his youth and inexperience, as Mr. Freeman put it; I will give him time to make acquaintance with other girls—real ladies, of his own class—that he may compare one with the other, as you say, Miss Edith; and if he gives them the preference, let him. Can I say anything fairer than that? As to giving Richard up, unless he asks me to do it—and not under compulsion, mind you: don't let them try that—I would not do it for all the wealth of the Indies, or to be a *prima donna* of her Majesty's Theatre to-morrow."

She spoke with uncommon fire and spirit; and, notwithstanding her ill-fitting and not well-chosen clothes, and with the poor surroundings of her chamber, looked of a majestic beauty. For the first time the sense of her extreme at-

tractiveness struck Sister Edith, who, without a particle of feminine jealousy, was slow to observe the mere charms of person. She felt that if she herself was thus impressed, the power of this girl over an impulsive boy like Richard might indeed be such as to override all considerations of prudence and filial duty. To defy this girl, against whom defiance had at first seemed far too formidable a weapon to be used, now appeared to be to invite defeat. Her very moderation showed a confidence in her own power, which suggested conciliation as much from fear as from any gentler feeling. Edith loved her nephew far too well to be won over, even for an instant, to the girl's view of the matter; but she experienced a certain admiration for her for which she was at a loss to account, since it was justified by neither religion nor virtue; and her face unconsciously expressed it.

"There shall be no menaces and no harsh treatment, Lucy, so far as I can prevent it," she said. "But, on the other hand, you must promise me not to molest Richard."

"Molest!" echoed the girl, with a proud smile. "No; I will certainly not molest him. I will not return to Durnton, let us say, for six months."

"Nor seek him elsewhere, in the mean time?"

"Of course not," answered Lucy, with a quick flush upon her cheek. "I mean to act straightforward; I have no mental—what does Mr. Vane call it?—reservations."

Edith was too intent upon her point to feel this sarcasm, to which she would have been otherwise sensitive enough.

"And you will hold no communication with Richard by letter?" She feared that here she would have met with opposition: she did not know that Lucy had some doubts about her own epistolary powers, and a disinclination to display them, especially to her lover.

"I will write Richard no letters, Miss Edith, for six months."

"You are a good girl, Lucy. Kiss me."

For the moment Sister Edith had permitted her mere instincts to get the better of her, and before she could regret the circumstance, Lucy had burst into tears and thrown herself in her arms. Nothing more was said on either side; but the elder woman felt, too late, that if she had given way to nature a little earlier, she might have obtained even greater concessions from her whom she could now hardly find it in her heart to call her adversary.

We are all so desperately clever, nowadays, or else (which is quite different) so exceedingly high-principled, that instinct is held to be a dead letter; and as for human creatures in one position of life being their own "flesh and blood" to those in another, the idea has only to be mentioned, as is seen, to evoke an incredulous smile. The philosopher, however, who remarked that "They didn't know everything down in Judee," might apply that observation, perhaps, with equal truth to a more modern country.

the evening train—a circumstance which relieved him from a state of discomfort (only known to those who, being stay-at-homes, find themselves at an inn alone), and begat a genuine sense of gratitude. Her letter was very short.

"DEAR SIR,—Lucy has given her promise not to return home for six months, and during that time neither to seek Richard out nor to correspond with him. This is the most I could obtain from her. You perceive it does not shut out R.'s coming or writing to her." [Here the rector smiled satirically. "Set a thief to catch a thief," said he to himself; "she must have learned these nice distinctions from her spiritual adviser."] "I think it right to add" (he read on) "that all harsh measures should be avoided with R. Indeed, it was only on that understanding that L. came to terms at all. She is in possession of the fact that it is possible for minors to be married by banns without consent of their parents." [The rector started; he saw at once that this was possible, though the circumstance had escaped him, and it was bad news indeed.] "Pray believe that I sympathize with all my heart with Francis in this matter, and will do all I can to aid him. Yours faithfully,

"EDITH TALBOT."

It had cost the writer a little struggle to thus subscribe herself, but she had rightly judged that her usual signature of "Sister Edith" would have aroused the rector's prejudices. As it was, as we have said, he felt grateful to his correspondent, and quite believed in her protestations of alliance as respected Richard.

In the mean while that young gentleman was not having what his friend Mr. Greene called "a good time" under the paternal roof. His father said "Good-morning" when he met him in the breakfast-room, and that was all. Dick was much alarmed lest his own conduct should form the matter of the usual extemporaneous discourse after family prayers, and listened to it with a most unwonted and anxious attention; but so far his father spared him. On the other hand, his silence seemed to proclaim that he was most grievously offended with him. The fact was that Mr. Talbot thought it wiser to say nothing to his son about the matter which had so much annoyed him, until he should have learned the issue of the rector's visit to him. This was most unfortunate as respected Richard, full of resentment that he could not show, and of wild schemes with respect to Lucy that he now knew to be impracticable. The statement dropped by the rector the night before, and which had all the more weight with him since it had been advanced less as an argument than a truism—that a minor could not marry without his parents' consent—deprived him of all power of action. Without any inclination for submission, he had not, it seemed, an opportunity to rebel. It would have been a relief to him if his father had put himself in a passion, and abused him in round terms; for to be treated with this silent displeasure had something of contempt in it as well as of disapprobation; and he was indignant beyond measure that his love for Lucy should be treated with contempt. He would prove even yet, if it were possible, that it was not a mere flower of the field to be cut down or left to wither, but a vigor-

CHAPTER XXII.

MR. PARKES'S VIEWS.

So prompt was Edith in her promised communication to the rector that he received it by hand at his hotel in time to start for Durnton by

ous growth that should bear fruit. The reason of this stubbornness of spirit did not lie in Richard's character—which was rather reckless than obstinate—so much as in the mode of his bringing-up, which had not been that of most boys. If he had not been positively his own master, he had been suffered to follow his own bent in most things to an unusual extent, and especially when at home. It is possible, too, that, without absolutely detecting it, he felt the inconsistency of his father's conduct in letting him associate with Lucy so long and unreservedly, and being now so angered at its natural result. He had no particular regard for her step-father, except as a companion in his field-sports, nor did his affection for her mother exceed a certain natural tenderness, but in his present extremity his heart turned toward them, as to his natural allies.

As soon as breakfast was over, and his father had withdrawn himself into the library, Richard started for the spinney. He purposely took the way through the village—first, because he wished his visit to be as public as possible: the time for secrecy had now gone by, and he wanted every body to know that he was not ashamed of his Lucy; and, secondly, because he dreaded the village gossip that must needs arise on account of his sudden return from Masham, and wanted to "get it over." He had, however, credited Rumor with greater celerity than she possessed (at least in Suffolk), for it was evident, though some of the good folks expressed surprise at seeing him at home so soon, no one had any idea of what had happened. Even Mrs. Parkes, whom he found alone at the cottage, was quite unaware of what had brought him there.

"Well, now, Master Dick," said she, in her gentle way, "it is really very good of you to come and see your old foster-mother. I had no idea you were to be back at Durnton so soon. If you had come yesterday you would have seen Lucy, though she was only here for a few hours."

"I *did* see her—at Swanborough," said Richard, flushing. "There has been a row about it."

"A row!" cried Mrs. Parkes, with a certain quick tremor that was habitual to her. "Oh, I hope nothing serious! How could Lucy have been so foolish?"

"It was not your daughter's fault at all, Mrs. Parkes."

"Thank Heaven for that! Not that she would mean to make mischief; she is too good a girl. And how could you help meeting her, if so it happened?"

"I met her on purpose, Mrs. Parkes, by appointment. I mean to meet her whenever I please, for she is to be my wife."

"Oh, hush, hush, Master Dick! Your father would never forgive us if he knew you said such things."

"He does know it; that is what the row is about."

"You have surely never, never dared to tell him!" cried the poor woman, her frail frame trembling like a leaf. "He will never give way; it is impossible. I always told her so, and George likewise. You should not have come here, or be seen having anything to do with us. Go, go!" And with her thin hands she strove to push him to the door.

"No, Mrs. Parkes. I am not ashamed of

Lucy, nor of you." He was about to add, "Nor of your husband," but even his excitement could not carry him to that length. "I thought you might have heard something about it, and that George might give me some advice as to what is to be done."

"Master Dick, you must not go to my husband for advice," whispered the woman, huskily. "I must say *that*, if he kills me for it: his advice would be your ruin. I have known what he has been at all along in this matter, though Lucy herself knows nothing of it. You must not listen to him. If your father were dead, and you were your own master, then things might be different."

"That would be doing behind my father's back what I dared not do before his face," said Richard, proudly. "I don't wish my father dead, but I mean to marry Lucy. If he chooses to disinherit me, let him!"

"You talk like a child, Master Dick. You don't know what disinheritance means; you don't know the trials and pains of poverty, nor yet the stings of one's own conscience when one feels that one has thrown away the happiness of our lives for a mere whim."

She spoke with rapid eagerness and vehemence, and it would have been plain to an older man that she was speaking from her life's experience; but Richard was only thinking of his own case.

"My love for your daughter is not a whim, Mrs. Parkes; and, at all events, I am prepared to pay its cost. That is my own lookout."

"Not altogether even that," answered the other, quickly. "George and I will be turned out of house and home at once. You will cause our ruin, to begin with; though that, God knows, was not the first thing I thought about. Can you and Lucy keep us as well as yourselves?"

"I hope my father will do nothing so unjust as that," said Richard, gravely. The idea of three persons becoming suddenly dependent upon him, who had nothing but a superficial knowledge of Latin wherewith even to make his own way in the world, staggered even him.

"Your father *will* do it, Master Dick, and I can't say unjustly. My husband—Here he comes down the lane: don't say a word to him of what I have said, but lay it to heart, as you hope for happiness." And with trembling hands she began to dust a chair.

"Halloo, Master Richard! What! *you* here?" cried the swarthy master of the house. "My old woman has made you welcome, I'll warrant; but if you had been here yesterday, you would have seen—Why, what's the matter with thee, lass?" he broke off, roughly; for Mrs. Parkes had been unable to restrain her tears.

"Well, everything's the matter, George. The squire has found out—I mean some one or another has been telling him—about our Lucy and Master Dick."

"Some one or another? Let me know his name!" exclaimed the giant, sternly. "If it's that sneak Jonathan, the underkeeper, I will cut his weasand for him! He shall tell no more tales."

"No, no; it's not Jonathan, nor anybody else," said Richard. "My father has found it out of his own head, and I am come to talk to you about it, George."

"All right, Master Richard: let's come and talk, then, out-of-doors; for some people" (here he looked at his wife with great disfavor) "are so foolish and namby-pamby that they are afraid of their own shadows, and try to make other people as frightened as themselves. Come out, Master Richard, and let us hear the worst of this little matter; and maybe," added he, lowering his voice to a confidential whisper, "the best of it too."

The two men sat down, therefore, in the cottage porch, with the door closed behind them, thus cutting off Mrs. Parkes from hearing their deliberations, just as Indian braves are wont to leave their squaws in the wigwam when they hold a council.

That one of the councillors, at least, was bent upon the war-path was evident from his appearance. The game-keeper's swarthy face was a shade darker even than usual, his heavy brow was puckered with a frown, and his tone, when he began to speak, had at least as much of hostility in it as of encouragement.

"Look here, Master Dick, you're in a tight place, no doubt; but don't you go for to show the white feather. If other folks are cutting up rough with you, you have George Parkes for your friend, remember—a man as has allus counted for two in a scrimmage."

"You always think that everybody is to be knocked down, George!" exclaimed Richard, with irritation. "A quarrel with one's family is not like a row with poachers."

"I am not so sure of that, sir," returned the other, doubtfully. "One's own family are very often poachers; and, for my part, I have found the very remedy of which you speak so lightly very useful. However, different cases require different treatment, no doubt. Now, just tell us all that has happened."

Richard therefore narrated everything that had occurred within the last twenty-four hours with respect to Lucy and himself, honestly taking upon himself the whole blame of their meeting at Swanborough, and expressing his intention to stick by her, come what might; at the same time, he by no means understated the obstacles that had opposed themselves to this line of conduct, and especially spoke with respect and regard for his father's views on the matter, while announcing his intention to oppose them.

"It is very natural, George, my father should be angry with me, and I wish from my heart that things had not turned out as they have done, at least at present. He looks on me, I can see, as little better than a school-boy, and one that doesn't know his own mind; and I don't want to be advised, mind you, to fly in his face."

"Certainly not, Master Richard. Dooty to one's parents is a very good thing," observed Mr. Parkes, approvingly. "Only there's something in the Scripture, you know, about giving the go-by to father and mother and all the rest of them, and cleaving to the girl of your choice. You mustn't let nobody frighten you, as though they had the whip-hand, when they haven't got it."

"Nay, as far as that goes, they *have* got it," returned Richard. "Lucy and I have not a shilling between us to marry upon; and even if *we had, we couldn't do it, as Mr. Freeman pointed out to me, without my father's consent, until I come of age.*"

"Ha! ha! the parson said that, did he? When you get to my age, Master Richard, you will not be so ready to believe in what the parsons tell you."

"But isn't it true, George?"

"It's a lie, my lad; it's a lie. You could marry Lucy in a month, all right and regular; and if they turn rusty you shall, too, and then you can snap your fingers at them. Of course, there will be a little money wanted, because you'll have to live for three weeks somewhere, while the banns are being published, on your own hook. But Lucy will have two hundred pounds of her own when she comes of age, and I know a party as will advance her something on that speculation."

A flush of triumph and expectancy for a moment came into Richard's face; but it looked grave enough as he replied, "I don't wish to make any breach with my father, George, unless it can possibly be avoided. He has been very good to me all my life, and I am his only son."

"That's just it," broke in the other, eagerly; "there's where you have the pull. It isn't as if you had any brother, so that the squire could say, 'Well, Bill or Tom shall have my money, and Dick shall have nothing, and be hanged to him! since he chose to have his own way.' When the knot is once tied between you and Lucy, he must needs make the best of a bad job, and forgive you, don't you see? Of course, there's me and the old lass, yonder—especially me—whom he will have to stomach a bit; but, bless you! George Parkes knows his place. He ain't the man to be going up to the Tower every afternoon, and saying, 'Well, I'm just come to take potluck with my son-in-law, Mr. Talbot, or smoke a pipe with him on the terra.'"

This picture of what might happen, though avowedly imaginary, struck Richard with considerable force, and had an effect quite different from that intended. He could not help portraying to himself his father's face on the reception of such a visitor, especially on a Sunday, which was the day Mr. Parkes chiefly devoted to calling on his friends and partaking of their hospitality.

"That would not do, of course, George," he said, bluntly. "I think, in case I was to marry Lucy, you would have to go away from Durnton."

"With all my heart, my lad; though it sounds curious that I should have to cut my moorings beside an old friend (if I may so call you), just because I have become related to him. However, it is you and yours, of course, who have to be considered in this matter. Only I must stand by my girl and her rights."

There was a menace in his tone which Richard was quick to catch, and he resented it.

"As to Lucy, George, I think it is my affair, at least, as much as yours. You are no kin to her, and have never shown her, I believe, any extraordinary affection."

"I love her like the apple of my eye, Master Richard, though I may have been hasty with her now and then. Of course, I was not speaking of you as likely to play her false; but I am her natural protector, and bound to see that others do not put upon her; that's all."

The tone of the speaker was conciliatory, but by no means fawning, and even the pretence of

affection that he made for his step-daughter had a cynical ring in it. Richard was well aware that "there was no love lost between them," for she had expressed to him the relations between herself and her step-father in that very phrase.

"What I am afraid of," continued Mr. Parkes, "is that when they come to put the screw on you, Master Dick, you will not stick to her."

"I will never give Lucy up, I tell you!" answered the lad, vehemently.

"Ay, but you must stick to her *now*. They will be for separating you, I reckon; for sending you abroad, and me, and the missus, and Lucy to Jericho."

"Then I shall join you in Jericho," said Richard, rising from his seat.

"That's bravely said; give me your hand upon it, Master Dick. Keep your head back, and fight low, and when they come within striking distance, hit out, my lad, and I'll stand by you."

Greatly comforted by which sage advice and promise of succor, Master Richard returned home.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TEMPORIZING.

ON the morning after his return from town the rector presented himself at the Tower, at an hour so early that it was some time before the house bell gave its usual summons for family prayer. He knew that he should find the squire in the library, deep in his books, or, what was more probable, deep in thought with some unread book before him. He understood his friend as thoroughly, perhaps, as it is possible for one man to understand another, who, nevertheless, has his own secrets. He knew that he was gloomy, taciturn, and self-involved—things all contrary to his natural disposition—and that the vision of the next world was seldom absent from his inward eyes. But he did not know that his nights were well-nigh sleepless, and his days disturbed by a scruple of conscience, nor the reason of it. The religious mind, although some well-meant attempts have been made to prove the contrary, is naturally austere; and to the rector, the nature (as he took it to be) of the subject of his friend's contemplations was a sufficient explanation of his character. Even the eccentricities of his conduct he set down to a theological cause, termed by persons of his way of thinking "the old man"—certain ruling passions which assert themselves in a modified form, no matter how sanctified and chosen is the human vessel to which they belong.

"This is kind of you, Freeman," was the squire's salutation to his friend; "you have been very prompt in your errand."

"Don't speak of that, Talbot. I came early to speak with you apart from Richard. How has the lad borne himself?"

"He has been silent, but I have purposely avoided giving him an opportunity to speak with me till I saw you."

"Have you sent for his friend Greene?"

"Yes; he will be here this morning."

"That is well. It is with Richard that we shall have to deal in this matter, and not with the girl at all."

"Not with the girl? You have found her reasonable, then?"

The rector shook his head.

"I cannot say that: she is fixed enough upon her point. But there is at least no immediate danger to be apprehended from any act of hers."

"Well, we know that. For four years to come Richard is protected from her wiles by the law itself."

"That is a mistake of mine; he is not protected, and she knows it."

"What! can my boy be ruined by this creature for life, just as he has crossed its threshold? It is impossible!"

"It is improbable, but not impossible. We must be very cautious and patient with him. He has something of your own resolute and vehement spirit. I must entreat you not to apply any injurious epithets to this girl in his presence, for to some extent, if I am not much mistaken, she will be your ally in this matter."

"My ally! My game-keeper's daughter my ally, and in her designs upon my own son! The girl must have bewitched you, Freeman."

The rector winced, for that was the very observation—accompanied by some much stronger ones—which his Dorothea had made to him when he informed her, in guarded terms, of the very moderate success of his enterprise.

"No, Talbot, she has not bewitched me; my views upon this unhappy matter are quite unaltered; but in some respects we have misjudged her. Her object, however much it is to be deprecated, is not mercenary; nor, in a bad sense, can she be called designing."

"You have been talking with my sister Edith," exclaimed the squire, suddenly.

The rector winced once more: his Dorothea had jumped to the same conclusion, though from a different stand-point. Conscious of her own weakness in respect to county families, she had accused her husband of having submitted to aristocratic influence.

"I have seen Miss Talbot, but I am positively convinced she has nothing to do with this affair. She assured me most solemnly that all her sympathies were on your side, and that she would do her best for us in Richard's interests."

"And you believed her?" answered the squire, bitterly. "You, a man who know what these Jesuits are, and who caution others against them, have been thus hoodwinked! I could not have believed this—though I could believe almost anything of them—if I had not heard it with my own ears."

"You would have believed your sister, had you heard her with your own ears," answered the rector, with some asperity. "What has she to gain by causing your son, for whom she has a sincere affection, to disgrace himself?"

"I don't know," returned the squire, contemptuously. "I don't pretend to know. Who can enter into the hearts of these idolaters and hypocrites? Perhaps she does not know herself: she is only their tool. But that they should have thus twisted a man like you round their fingers—" And the squire threw up his hands in astonishment and horror.

"Indeed, sir," said the rector, with a red spot on either cheek, "it is you who are twisted, warped, and biassed in your mind, so that it rejects all reason. The girl is altogether out of

your sister's control, and, indeed, any one's control."

"What! do you mean to say that this girl, who is not designing, you say, found out of her own head that it was possible to marry my son, though a minor, otherwise than in the usual way?"

"That is certainly a circumstance that puzzles me, but I am quite sure that your sister was not her informant. From Richard's manner the other night, I am pretty sure he does not share her knowledge of the fact, and that is something."

"Something!" said the squire, striding hastily up and down the room; "and I am to trust to his not being enlightened to save him from immediate disgrace? You have brought me cold comfort indeed, sir."

"I have brought you, Talbot, what comfort I could. It is no use to give way to passion, however natural. If ever one may be angry and yet sin not, I allow that it may be so in your case; but I am convinced that it would be most dangerous to take strong measures with either the girl or Richard. She has promised neither to see nor write to him for the space of six months. A great deal may be done in that time toward weeding him of this folly. And, for the present, it is most important that he should not be left to himself to brood or scheme. That is why I am so solicitous about the coming of his young friend."

The squire took a letter from his pocket and tossed it over to the other. "That is from Mr. Greene, who seems to have an intelligence beyond his years, and some good feeling also."

The rector read as follows:

"Private. The Manor, Masham.

"DEAR MR. TALBOT,—I shall present myself at Talbot Tower to-morrow morning. I quite understand what I am wanted for, and shall do my best to further your wishes, for I feel that in so doing I shall be acting for the good of my friend, your son. Yours very truly,

"ROBERT GREENE."

"That 'I quite understand what I'm wanted for' is frank, at all events," observed the rector, dryly. He had heard more about Mr. Greene from Richard than the squire had, and entertained a strong suspicion that he was very flippant.

"I don't mind a little straightforwardness," observed the other. "It shows he is at least no Jesuit. In my opinion, we should go straight to the point with Richard."

"If you mean, by that, to use strong measures with your son, you will, in my opinion, Talbot, be making a great mistake."

"If I speak to him at all, I must speak out," said the squire.

"Then don't speak to him at all: let me do the speaking for you. Of course, I should not propose this if we had an equal knowledge of this affair; but I have had the advantage of seeing this girl, and you have not. I do assure you it is a case, not for compromise, of course, but for temporizing."

The squire had, in the main, a great confidence in the rector's judgment, and he was conscious that the vehemence of his own feelings

prevented him from taking a judicious view of the position. If it had not been for his discovery that his friend had held speech with his sister, he would not have hesitated for a moment in acceding to the other's proposal; and after a few turns up and down the room, during which the rector kept a judicious silence, he did accede to it.

"You may take your own way, Freeman, though it seems to me a monstrous thing that a father may not point out to his own son the consequences of wilful disobedience to his wishes."

"I shall certainly not omit to mention them, Talbot—nay, to insist upon them; but they should not, in my judgment, be put in the foreground. Here comes the young gentleman himself."

Here Richard entered the room. His face was pale and grave, and, though it looked resolute enough, wore also a certain air of anxiety. Upon seeing that his father was not alone, he stepped back toward the door. The rector at once understood that silence and suspense had become intolerable to the boy, and that his intention had been to have the matter "out" which had estranged him from his father.

"A letter has just come from your friend Greene, my boy," said Mr. Talbot, "in answer to one I wrote to him, inviting him to pass some time with you at the Tower, and you will be glad to hear that he will arrive this morning."

"You are very good, sir, but—" the lad was about to say that no companionship, however agreeable, would turn him from the matter on which he had set his heart, or cause him to forget it for a moment, when he caught sight of the uplifted finger of the rector, accompanied by what mathematicians term "the negative sign," indicated by a movement of that gentleman's head. Quick as thought, he changed front in the face of the enemy, and added, "But I fear, father, you will find my friend's stay here somewhat troublesome."

Mr. Talbot waved his hand impatiently; it meant, as Richard knew, "What is trouble compared with the mischief that you are contemplating?" and stalked gloomily out of the room.

"Your father does not wish to be spoken to, Richard, upon the matter, which, as I guess, you came to discuss with him this morning. He has delegated the whole affair to me. I went to London yesterday, at his request, and had an interview with the young person—"

"You have seen Lucy?" exclaimed Dick, with an eager air.

"Yes, I have seen her, and had a long talk with her. I am bound to say she seems to me, for her station of life, a very decent young woman, and not unreasonable." This was, it must be confessed, but faint praise, and, what was more, by no means the sort of praise most welcome to Richard.

"If you mean by 'reasonable' to imply that she has consented to give me up, I don't believe it, Mr. Freeman."

"You are unnecessarily discourteous, Richard," answered the rector, with dignity. "I implied nothing of the sort; but the girl at least understood that it would be very selfish and wicked of her to discredit you—and still more herself—by any more such meetings as that at Swanborough. She perceives that it is only fair,

—to use no stronger word—that you should see a little more of life, and your own sphere of it, before seeking to exchange it for a lower; that you should learn to know your own mind, and keep it undisturbed by the promptings of mere passion; and therefore for the present, at all events—that is to say, for six months to come—she consents to hold no communication with you either by word or letter.”

“It is incredible! I must have it from her own lips before I can believe it,” cried Richard, precipitately.

“That is impossible,” answered the rector; “she has given her word, as I have just said, to the contrary.”

“Then I shall write to her by to-day’s post, and if I don’t hear from her within twenty-four hours, I shall know my letter has been tampered with; and in that case I shall go to her.”

The air and tone with which these words were spoken would have befitted an imperial ultimatum, and they had a force for the rector of which the speaker was quite ignorant. He thought of that possible marriage by banns—in the district, perhaps, of Shoreditch—and trembled.

“My dear Richard,” said he, in a more conciliatory tone, “you should know your father too well to suppose that, under any circumstances, he would stoop to intercept a letter. You may write, of course—if you can reconcile it to your sense of duty to do so—but I must again remind you that Lucy’s promise must prevent her from replying. She has the good feeling to see that no influence of hers ought to be brought to bear upon you for some time to come; that you should be left to yourself, and the promptings of your own conscience.”

“You would persuade me that she has been convinced by mere arguments,” said Richard, naively, “and that, I am sure, she never can have been. Though it is possible, from what I know of her, that she has consented to put my fidelity to the test.”

“Yes, that is it,” said the rector, eagerly. “She sees, of course, that it is, to say the least of it, quite possible, as your judgment matures, and you have the opportunity of seeing more of the world, that you will acknowledge to yourself that you have made a mistake in this matter.”

“And if, after six months, I find I have made no mistake,” returned the lad, “am I to understand that my father will be more inclined to yield to my wishes?”

“My dear Richard, remember what the Scripture says, ‘Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.’”

“I don’t see the application of that to my case, Mr. Freeman,” answered the other, dryly. “I understand that I am expected to do as you suggest, but not what I am to get by it.”

“Get by it!” echoed the rector, justly indignant, as he tried to persuade himself, by Richard’s indifference to the sacred text, but in reality irritated by the lad’s obstinacy, at the moment, too, when he had seemed to be yielding. “That is a strange question for a son to put who is asked to comply with his father’s wishes. I am bound to say that even the girl herself did not put the matter on so low a ground.”

“That was because she was thinking of my interests, and not her own, Mr. Freeman. I shall

certainly not permit you to take advantage of her unselfishness.”

This flight in morals was so far beyond anything that the rector had expected in his young friend that it fairly staggered him. It convinced him, for the first time, that the matter must needs be serious, since the contemplation of it could have effected such a mental revolution.

“No,” continued the lad, after a pause, “I am not going to be caught in a trap. I don’t wish to be rude, Mr. Freeman, but I must have some more certain evidence of Lucy’s wishes than your bare word. I shall write to her by to-day’s post—and I must have an answer.”

“Will you take your aunt Edith’s word?” said the rector, desperately.

“Aunt Edith!” cried Richard, quickly. “Does she know about this? Has she spoken to Lucy?”

“I am quite sure that for your sake she will speak to her,” answered the rector, gravely; “and through her you can receive the information you require.”

“Then that will do,” said Richard. “I will believe Aunt Edith.” The young gentleman’s tone was not only contented, but joyful. He did not know, of course, that his aunt was already committed to the other side; and he flattered himself that he could write such an epistle to Lucy as, being shown to Edith, would move her to favor his cause. The rector’s reticence, however judicious, was not, perhaps, very straightforward, and moreover, he had determined to use a similar reserve with the squire: it would never do to tell him that he had obtained his son’s consent to the present arrangement by calling in such an ally as Sister Edith. In his own mind, he felt an ample justification for this conduct, which was, after all, merely prudential, and for the best of ends; but if Father Vane had behaved so, it would by some people have been called Jesuitry.

CHAPTER XXIV.

“TOMMY” GREENE AT DURTONTON.

AT breakfast nothing was said concerning Dick’s affairs, but that young gentleman understood from his father’s manner that the result of his interview with the rector had been communicated to him, and was held to be satisfactory.

“I am afraid your friend will find the Tower a little dull, Richard, after Masham,” said the squire; “but we must do what we can for him. He can take his choice of the horses.”

“You are very good, sir,” answered Dick, smiling—and it was his first smile for four-and-twenty hours—“but I don’t think he will put your kindness in that way to the test. He does not care for horses. I never saw Henry Pole so angry (but once) as when Greene endeavored to prove to him that the horse was the most stupid, nervous, and dependent of all animals, and infinitely inferior to a second-rate cat. Tommy—that was Greene’s nickname at Eton, sir—is not a sporting character, and was quite one by himself, as it were, at Masham.”

“Indeed! Then the Tower may not be so distasteful to him, if at least he be a reader.”

“Well, yes, sir, he has read a lot, I believe.” Richard knew that he had “read a lot,” but expressed himself thus doubtfully for fear of aroun-

ing groundless expectation. He had a suspicion that Tommy's tastes had not led him into the same paths of literature that the squire patronized, and this view proved subsequently to be correct.

The expected guest happened to arrive during Richard's temporary absence from the house, and was ushered, as usual, into the library.

"Mr. Greene, I am very pleased to see you," said the squire, frankly; "and, indeed, sincerely grateful to you for your presence."

"Don't mention it, sir; delighted, I'm sure," answered the other.

"I fear you will find the Tower a change for the worse, after Masham."

"I think not, Mr. Talbot; for, in the first place, I see you have printed books. Except a work in manuscript, upon cookery, belonging to Miss Latour, and a volume on farriery, with a supplementary treatise on (I think) glanders, in the possession of Henry Pole, I have not seen a book for these three weeks."

"All that are here are at your service, Mr. Greene. I have a pretty extensive theological library."

"Ah, the Fathers," observed Mr. Greene, who was nervously afraid of a dissertation; "I am sorry to say that they are not much in my line."

"You need not be sorry on that account, Mr. Greene," replied the squire. "In my opinion, there is far too much authority accorded to them, and too much attention altogether paid to that branch of literature."

"Quite my view," said Mr. Greene, his eyes running over the serried lines of books, and finding not a single work whose title looked in any way promising; indeed, for the most part they were utterly unknown to him even by name.

"That is the history of the great controversy between Calvin and Servetus," observed the squire, following the direction of his gaze.

"Ah, they were rather rough upon Servetus," observed Mr. Greene, lightly.

"Rough upon him?" echoed the squire, interrogatively.

"Well, they burned him, didn't they?"

"He was certainly put to death for his errors; but that was to prevent their spreading. Unhappily we cannot kill and cure."

"Figs," suggested Mr. Greene, "are an exception to that theory." He looked as grave as a judge (which was his way, when not convulsed with mirth); the squire compelled his mouth to form a smile.

"You have wit," he said, in a tone which might more fitly have expressed, "You have a touch of leprosy." "From what Richard tells me, I conclude you are also a scholar."

What Mr. Greene thought to himself was, "Then Richard has been lying;" but what he said was, "Your son and I have read some classics together;" and so they had—taking turns which should read the original and which "the crib."

"You will find the Greek authors on yonder shelf. Some of them are no doubt meritorious; but, as I understand (for I am no scholar myself), others are very far from edifying."

"There are queer things in Lempriere, no doubt," assented Mr. Greene.

"I believe and hope that I do not possess that

author," said the squire; "I do not see it on the shelf."

"The proper place for it," observed the other. He could not help flashing out these little volleys any more than a summer cloud can restrain its sheet-lightning.

"Yes; it would be here if anywhere," returned his unconscious host. "I believe it is partly owing to these ancient writers that our lads are made so—so—"

"Precocious," suggested Mr. Greene.

"Just so. Now, in poor Richard's case, with which you are better acquainted, doubtless, than myself—"

"Never saw the young woman but once, upon my honor," interrupted Mr. Greene, alarmed at being considered an accessory before the fact.

"To my knowledge, I have never set eyes on her," said the squire, in a tone which seemed to imply, "And I trust I never shall."

"Well, you have missed something, then: she is really very pretty. If a woman can look well in a pork-pie hat, with a bird-of-paradise feather in it (or something like it), one must allow she must look well in anything."

"A pork-pie hat, with a bird-of-paradise feather in it!" repeated the squire, with a groan. His memory, straying far back into his unregenerate days for some parallel to this decorative style, had served him perhaps only too well.

"That is the head-gear in which I saw her at Swanborough," observed Mr. Greene, in mitigation; "but it may not be her usual attire, and even if it is, bad taste in dress is not an unpardonable crime, Mr. Talbot."

The squire shook his head. The pie and the bird were to him the external indications of inward worthlessness; and yet, perhaps, he was less troubled than if the other had convinced him of the girl's good sense and virtue; for that would have seemed somehow to suggest that objections to the match were not insuperable.

"Has Richard ever spoken to you, Mr. Greene, about—about this miserable attachment of his?"

"I never heard of it, sir, till I saw the lady. And yet it is not Dick's way to be secretive. That is what puzzles me more than anything in the matter. It is my impression that some third party has been pulling the strings." And Mr. Greene performed that pantomimic action with which every one who has seen Mr. Charles Mathews in the "Game of Speculation" is familiar.

"Ah! and whom do you suspect?"

"Well, Mr. Pole tells me the young lady has a step-father who is up to anything; but then, again, it seems, he is, or was, opposed to the game-laws, and of such a person Mr. Pole would say anything."

"No, no, it's not Parkes," said the squire, thoughtfully. "He has not the head for such a plot— Well, at all events, I can rely upon your co-operation, Mr. Greene, in our efforts to save my son from ruin. Even if the object of his affections were all we could wish her to be, the idea of a lad of Richard's age falling seriously in love would, you perceive, be quite preposterous."

"Utterly ridiculous," replied the other, confidently. He had been just six months older than his friend when he had proposed in form—though his intentions had been misunderstood—to Miss Meredith, through her uncle.

Upon the whole, Mr. Talbot was well satisfied with his young guest, and had "got on" better with him than would probably have been possible under other circumstances. His trust, too, in his fealty was well grounded; for though impulsive in the conduct of his own affairs, Mr. Leonard Greene was, for his years, astute (he called it "leary") in worldly matters, and he could be prudent enough in the affairs of a friend. Unfortunately, however, he had too high an opinion, though natural enough, considering its effect upon himself, of the power of ridicule; and, since that weapon adapted itself to him very readily, was much too prone to use it. If he had been laughed out of his proposal to Miss Meredith, how much more, he reasoned, should Richard yield to "chaff" in his relation to the game-keeper's daughter!

"Well, Dick, and how is she?" were the first words with which he greeted his old school-fellow.

"How is *who*?" replied the other, blushing, but speaking with great dignity.

"Why, your Dulcinea del Toboso, of course; Miss Lucy Lindon, of Durnton Regis."

"She is very well, I believe," returned Dick, in a tone like that of a refrigerator endowed with speech.

"You believe? Come, that's a good one! Do you mean to say you don't write to her every day—that you are not going to write to her this very morning?"

"As it happens," replied Richard, "I *am* going to write to her this morning."

"Of course you are: give her my love. By-the-bye, I am charged with all kinds of tender messages for you from Masham. Even Miss Latour sent her compliments, and Pretty Poll" (which was his name for Margaret Pole) "was quite effusive."

Poor Dick, though oppressed by his relatives and deserted by his friend, had still a kick left in him.

"And what," he inquired, "did your Miss Meredith say?"

"My Miss Meredith! Well, I believe she wishes you as well as anybody."

"You believe? Come, that's a good one! Do you mean to say you don't know every thought of her heart?"

"Well, well, that's a fair hit," said Mr. Greene, changing color, however, as though he had undergone that form of punishment for lower boys at Eton called "a punch in the wind;" "only our cases are not quite parallel, Talbot. Miss Meredith is a lady born—"

"Oh, I thought you didn't believe in birth and blood and all that!" interrupted Richard, cynically. "I have heard you call it 'rot.'"

Here again he had "neatly put in his left;" for Leonard Greene, like most exceptionally clever boys, possessed democratic opinions which he sometimes found difficult to reconcile with certain instincts of another kind.

"Well, of course they are 'rot,'" answered he, with irritation; "that is, with respect to all ordinary things, and to all men who are worth speaking about: but with women it is different. They are not strong enough to be independent of 'position.' There's something about a lady—dash it! I don't know what it is; but you must have observed it yourself: at all events, you can see

very well where it's wanting, and it's a miserable thing, my dear fellow, you may depend upon it, to be ashamed of one's wife. Marriage stands quite on a different ground to anything else; it's like the advertisement of the Funeral Company, 'Feelings of relatives consulted,' etc., etc. One must be respectable on some occasions, and marriage, depend on it, is one of them."

"Thank you," said Richard. "I shall never be ashamed of Lucy, and when I marry her, I shall be doing nothing that is not respectable. Will you have a cigar?"

"By all means," said Mr. Greene, who felt he had done his duty, even if nothing had come of it, and that he deserved some relaxation.

"My father has some very good weeds, though he himself doesn't use them."

"That's odd," said the other, thoughtfully; "since you tell me he says he is 'a brand plucked from the burning,' he certainly ought to smoke."

Amicable relations thus being re-established, Richard showed his young friend over the place; and among other objects of interest, the Rectory, of the tenants of which he spoke with a frankness peculiar to his age. "You must see Freeman and his wife sooner or later," he said; "and you may just as well get it over at once."

Mrs. Freeman welcomed her visitor with effusion, as she would have welcomed any guest of the squire's; but her interest in Richard and his escapade compelled her to give him most of her attention, and so Mr. Greene was handed over to the rector. As they walked in the garden, there was an opportunity for a private word or two.

"We are glad to have you at Durnton, Mr. Greene, at this crisis in Richard's life," observed the rector, significantly. "We have every confidence that your influence will be exerted for his good."

"Well, I'm dead against his making a fool of himself, of course," said Mr. Greene, modestly.

"It is unhappily worse than folly," sighed Mr. Freeman. "I had hoped that in sending him to Masham his budding affections would have been led into a proper channel. Now, if it had been Miss Pole, or even Miss Meredith."

"Just so," said Mr. Greene, with a ghastly smile, and muttering to himself, "Confound his impudence!"

"It is so important that, on coming to man's estate, we should entertain some virtuous attachment."

"You married your first love, then, Mr. Freeman?"

"Hush!" whispered the rector, hastily, for his wife was within three yards of him, and his companion had purposely raised his voice. "This is certainly," thought he, "the most forward young man I ever met with."

Then Mrs. Freeman, having pumped Richard as dry as she could, took her other guest in hand, and proceeded to sink her artesian-well in him.

"You found Masham very gay, no doubt, Mr. Greene; I fear you will find you have exchanged quarters for the worse in that respect."

"Not at all," answered he, politely, and, indeed, he had already found a good deal of humorous amusement at Durnton.

"Charming old gentleman, Mr. Pole," said she, "if it wasn't for his queer goings-on. He is very much thought of in the whole county."

"That doesn't prevent his thinking of himself a good deal," observed Mr. Greene.

"That is true; yet we must consider his position: it is unique. There will be nobody exactly to fill his place when he is gone."

"No one person could do it," assented her companion, dryly.

Mrs. Freeman did not understand this.

"And Mr. Henry Pole is charming, too, in his way," she went on; "there is such an air of distinction about him."

"He smells very distinctly of the stable," said Mr. Greene, acidly. He liked few of the men at Masham, and the young squire least of all.

"That is true, again; horses have been the ruin of that family. Horses and dogs and—so on. One forgives, however, a man in Mr. Pole's position for being horsey. It is in a woman that one particularly dislikes such tastes. Is it true that Miss Meredith rides to hounds?"

"She rides after them, I believe."

"So I have heard. Now, how sad that is! How dear Margaret Pole could have chosen such a young woman for her friend I can't imagine. Now, my dear girls—I have lost one of them by death and one by marriage—"

"There is always danger in leaving home," interpolated Mr. Greene, in much embarrassment.

"Home? How do you mean? As to dear Dorothy, she never left me, and was wooed and won beneath her father's roof— Well, Richard, if you must go, you must. But I hope you will bring your friend: he belongs to the Greenses, of Leicestershire, I conclude—"

Mr. Greene nodded: his father had been a dry-salter on Tower Hill; but he was not going to be let in "for another moment's conversation with that woman," as he subsequently expressed himself.

"I say, you must bring your friend to see us again, Richard," continued Mr. Freeman, "and I hope, some day, to partake with us of a family dinner."

As soon as they had got out of the house, Richard asked his friend what he thought of his new acquaintances.

"Oh, the man is terrible, though very funny; but the woman—I suppose it's her mustache" (Mrs. Freeman wore a little one), "I couldn't understand half she said. I am certain I made some terrible mistake about what she told me of her daughters."

"She said she had 'lost one by death and one by marriage,' didn't she?" said Dick. "She tells everybody that."

"That was it, by Jove!" returned Mr. Greene, slapping his slender thigh. "I thought she said that she had lost one at Bath and one at Norwich."

How those young gentlemen did rear together over that little mistake!

CHAPTER XXV.

A FUTURE FATHER-IN-LAW.

As dirt has been described (by a competent authority) to be matter in the wrong place, so *good-for-nothing people* would often be of some utility if they were placed in different positions, and vice versa. If Peter the Great, for example,

instead of being the Czar of Russia, had happened to be a coal-heaver, he would certainly have passed most of his days in prison, and probably ended them on the gibbet. His self-will and brutality would not have been pardoned to him, and there would have been no opportunity for the display of his abilities. Similarly, to compare small things with great, Mr. George Parkes, of Durnton Regis, about whom history (save this humble record) is silent, and whose name had never appeared in print except in respect of petty sessions in connection with offenses against the game-laws, might have been a great man had he been born in the purple. He had an iron will, and was utterly without scruples. He had the courage of a lion, and the cunning of a fox. He was faithful to his friends (before he lost them) to an extraordinary degree; for though he loved himself beyond anything and everybody, he would never "round" on them, and escape out of a difficulty at their expense. If instead, therefore, through circumstances over which he had no control—one of which was his temper—of finding his hand against every man's and every man's hand against his, he had found men's hands at his autocratic disposal, he would have probably cut a remarkable, though never a respectable, figure in the world. It would have been rank blasphemy to have said so in Suffolk, where they were held in very different estimation; but the fact was, Walter Pole and George Parkes were cast by nature in very similar moulds, and of the two the game-keeper was the more estimable. He had much more "character" than the squire of Masham, and very bad—to judge by common report—it was.

Mr. Leonard Greene had heard so much about him, and all to his disadvantage, at the manor, and especially since Richard's escapade, that he longed to make his acquaintance on his own account, independently of the interest that attached to him through his (proposed) connection with his friend. Mr. Greene had a keen eye for character; and though himself of a gentle and even fastidious disposition, could tolerate a good deal in his fellow-creatures, thanks to his ever-mastering sense of humor—that precious gift which makes even ruffians endurable to him who possesses it, and the absence of which in the gentler sex is the cause of no little of their unhappiness and discontent.

"Talbot," said Mr. Greene, on the second day of his stay at the Tower, "I should like to see Mr. Parkes."

"Do you mean my father's game-keeper?" answered Richard, with a quick flush. "What is the use of it? There are no partridges yet, and, besides, you never shoot."

"Once I shot for nuts, at a stall in Bachelor's Acre," observed Greene, plaintively. "Still, as you scornfully suggest, I am no sportsman; but that is no reason why I should not make the acquaintance of Mr. Parkes."

"You are curious about him because he is Lucy's step-father," said Richard, gloomily. "If you are thinking of making fun of him, you'll find it rather a dangerous experiment."

"Fun of him! My dear Talbot, I am astonished at you," returned his friend, with gravity. "I shall treat him, of course, with very particu-

* Where Windsor Fair used to be held.

lar respect. That I am curious to see him is true enough, and surely natural enough. I don't wish to allude to a subject which it is tacitly understood is closed between us, but don't you see how utterly impossible you represent your position to be with respect to this girl, if you are ashamed of even exposing her relations to the human eye? He is not a black man, is he? And even if he were, that wouldn't matter, as he is not to be a blood-relation." This style was so natural to his friend that Richard was not annoyed at it, and he felt his argument to have some force.

"I am not ashamed of Lucy's father, of course," said he, "who, after all, is, as you say, only her step-father. We will call upon him after luncheon to-day, which is his dinner-hour."

And accordingly they did so. They arrived at the spinney just as its inmates had concluded their mid-day meal. Mrs. Parkes was clearing the table, and her lord and master enjoying a glass of hot grog with his after-dinner pipe.

"Glad to see you, young gentlemen. Annie, put chairs," was his welcome, given not without a touch of dignity.

"This is my foster-mother, Greene," said Richard, introducing his friend to his hostess. "She does not object, you see, to tobacco."

Mrs. Parkes, always neat and very comely, with a certain air, too, of refinement, which was partly, perhaps, submissiveness born of ill-usage, set about making little preparations—i. e., more tumblers and hot water—for the comfort of her guests, with cheerful alacrity. Fortunately she did not understand the situation, as her more acute husband did at once, or she would have been nervous and "off her head."

"Sit you there, sir; it's out of the draught," said she, gently; "and, Master Richard, this is your place, as you well know."

"I ought to know, at all events, Mrs. Parkes; I've been here often enough," said Richard, smiling, though ill at ease. "Your cottage has been a second home to me."

"A very poor one," returned his hostess, depreciatingly. "It must be very pleasant to have this young gentleman with you at the Towers."

It was curious that the poor people, even including the young squire's foster-mother, always called the Tower "the Towers."

"Yes; it's rather dull there, unless one has a friend of one's own age for one's companion."

"But you had a mouseeener there the other day, had you not, Master Richard?" inquired George. He made the remark in an indifferent tone, but he meant it to have its significance. Everybody at Durnton who had ever heard of De Blaise believed him to be the squire's natural son; and Mr. Parkes intended to suggest that *mésalliances*, although, indeed, irregular ones, were not unknown in the Talbot family: he had the sagacity to perceive the force of a precedent.

"Oh, the young Frenchman!" said Dick, not perceiving this stroke of policy, nor even understanding that a reflection upon his father was intended. "He was with us but for a day or two; and I hope my friend will make a good long stay."

"I never heard of the Frenchman," said Greene. "Who is he?"

"A son of an old friend of my father's," said

Dick, with a quick flush; for he was aware of the popular view of their relationship.

Mrs. Parkes blushed also; and her husband, who was looking straight at Mr. Greene, deliberately closed his left eye. He could not have expressed his meaning more clearly if he had exhibited the Talbot family tree, with *all* its branches.

"Frenchmen are very clever fellows," observed Mr. Greene, with that prompt instinct to rescue the party from embarrassment which is, quite erroneously, supposed to be the peculiar property of the female sex. "I was reading in the paper yesterday a striking example of it. In Paris, it seems they take purses just as in England we catch fish. The sportsman takes his seat in an omnibus, furnished with a line of thin but strong black silk, with a shot at the end of it. When a neighbor takes out his portemonnaie, he throws his fly—that is, the shot—into it, unperceived, and when the victim puts it back into his pocket, it is to all intents and purposes in that of the sportsman. He has only to pull at the silk, and the shot acting as a hook, he lands it."

"That's very neat," said Mr. Parkes, approvingly; "but, lor bless yer, we're just as crafty in London. I once—that is, a friend of mine did—got an Isle of Skye doag quite as cleverly. We had been after that doag—I tell the story as he used to tell it—for weeks, but its missis knew its valley, and kep her eye on it. At last he worked the oracle. Her husband got the office—found out where it was, I mean—and come down to our place in the borough. He was a sporting sort of fellow, and took a common-sense view of the matter. 'You've got the doag, I know,' says he, 'and you want five pounds for it: very well, here's the money, and mum's the word. But I just want to know, for my own satisfaction, how the deuce you got that doag. My wife, she will take her oath there was not a man in sight when she lost it, and she had seen the doag at her heels but a few seconds before. Come, if you'll tell me, I'll stand glasses round.'"

"Well," says my friend, 'as you're of the right sort, and also since one never plays the same game twice (at least with the same party), I'll tell you. Your missis says as there was no man in sight when her dog was picked up; but was there no *woman*?'"

"Not a soul, except a milk-woman," says the gentleman, 'and she didn't see nobody take the dog neither.'"

"Well, I dare say she didn't. That milk-woman was my gal, you see; and she had the dog herself at that moment in an empty milk-pail. Which was just the way how it was done."

The young gentlemen were delighted with this narrative, which Mrs. Parkes was far from being. Some wives always fail to appreciate their husbands' anecdotes, no matter how humorous they may be. This arises sometimes, no doubt, from their having heard them once or twice before; but in this case there seemed a deeper reason.

"Don't tell such shocking stories, George!" exclaimed she, reprovingly. "You will almost make the gentlemen think that you thought it right to steal the dog."

"My dear madam," said Mr. Greene, "I think the ingenuity displayed by your husband's

acquaintance ought to have been rewarded by fifty dogs."

"It was certainly very clever," said Dick, reluctantly.

This stimulus of praise, assisted by that of a second glass of gin-and-water, was not without its effect on Mr. Parkes. To steal a dog was with him no greater offense than to kill a flea; indeed, he would not have stooped to the latter crime, for fleas were both familiar to him and welcome; they never troubled him. Having found an appreciative audience, he could not resist the opportunity of display—a common weakness, but one which it is often injudicious to indulge.

"Clever!" said he, contemptuously; "oh, that's nothing to some of the little games I could tell you about!"

"Oh, do tell us!" exclaimed Mr. Greene; "I love games—especially of skill."

"Well, there was another London friend of mine—leastways, an acquaintance—who, between you and me, would sometimes crack a crib."

"Crack a *what*?" inquired Richard, with irritation, for he had a presentiment that Mr. Parkes had much better hold his tongue.

"Oh, I understand," said Greene. "He had a weakness for entering houses that were not his own, and snapping up any unconsidered trifles."

"Just so," said George, with an approving nod; "you know a thing or two, I see. He was a house-breaker."

"Oh, George," cried Mrs. Parkes, "how can you?"

"Nay, how could *he*? Mr. Greene here has told us about the omnibus trick as was played by a friend of his—"

"Quite so," put in that young gentleman, airily; "this happened in a higher walk of business, that's all."

"Well, it was a more dangerous walk, at all events," resumed the narrator. "He had to look where he was going, I can tell you, before he took a single step. Well, there was one house in the suburbs as he was very sweet upon; only they kept a doag. Not a Isle of Skye one like the other, but a tarrier—the very worst sort o' doag as could be kep for my friend's purposes, and a deal of trouble he had before he could give him toko."

"Send him to sleep, I suppose?" conjectured Mr. Greene.

"Ay, for a good long sleep," continued the other, grimly, "and nobody knew on it. Then my friend he got into the house all right, but a little too early; the tenant kep very late hours, and matters went so unfortunate that hanged if he wasn't drove to hide under the man's bed!"

"What! with the man in it?" inquired Mr. Greene, with intense interest.

"Well, not at first; but he came to his room, and undressed, and went to bed, and there was my poor friend underneath it."

"That must have been a very embarrassing position," observed Mr. Greene, with sympathy.

"He was in a blessed state, sir, I do assure you. However, he lays still, and when the man began to snore he creeps out. Somehow or other, however, he made a noise, and the other *awoke*. 'Gip, Gip,' says he, thinking it was the doag, 'where are you, old doag?' He put out his

hand in the dark to feel for him, and what d'ye think my friend did? Well, *he licked his hand*, and the man thought it *was* the doag, and went to sleep again. Now, that's what I call a clever trick, and equal to any Frenchman's."

"It was simply charming!" exclaimed Mr. Greene, with rapture. "I should have liked to have known your friend."

"Well, you may, perhaps, some day—who knows?" said Mr. Parkes, with a grim chuckle. "It was certainly a rummy go, that was."

The entertainment of one's friends would be an easier task than it is if they were guaranteed to have the same tastes, moral and intellectual, as ourselves; but, as matters stand, such is the fastidiousness of some folks that what is a very good story indeed in a host's opinion, is sometimes in that of his guests a downright bad one. It was the misfortune, for example, of Mr. George Parkes to regard all forms of robbery with too charitable an eye, and to see humor in everything, not excepting burglary with violence.

His present audience might have been considered a safe one, since it consisted of the wife of his bosom (well accustomed by this time to moral shocks); his would-be step-son, who might naturally be expected to take things in good part; and Mr. Leonard Greene, who had openly shown his appreciation. But, as a matter of fact, poor Mrs. Parkes was horror-struck; she had never heard her husband talk with such audacious frankness, at least before his third tumbler, and trembled for the effect upon his audience; while Richard had listened to his vivid details with the same feelings with which a gunpowder manufacturer might regard a display of fireworks in his immediate neighborhood; his apprehensions were only partially subdued, even when it was all over, by his friend's expressions of satisfaction.

"Curious fellow—old Parkes—is he not, Greene?" had been Richard's tentative remark, as they walked home together from the spinney.

"Very curious," answered Mr. Greene. "Tells stories capitally. One would almost think he was relating them out of his personal experience."

"Ah, about the dog and the milk-pail? Well, it's just possible it was so. George was very wild and queer in his youth, I believe; but all that's over now; and though his circumstances are, as you see, very humble, there is nothing to be said against his respectability."

"Poor, but honest, eh?" said Mr. Greene, dryly. "Well, you ought to know him better than I. Still, I think it was rather strong to tell us that story of Mrs. P. No. 1 in the presence of Mrs. P. No. 2. It wouldn't be nice for her to hear that the previous possessor of her husband's affections used to prig Skye-terriers in her milk-pails."

"Yes, but George exaggerates so; and, then, one must make allowances for people's views. At Eton, for instance, one bags another fellow's tea and sugar, and thinks nothing of it. You told me yourself that even at your club you can never feel sure of your umbrella; and perhaps in the circle in which old George used to move, it was thought rather fun than otherwise to 'annex' dogs."

"But, then, there was the other dog," observed Greene, gravely.

"You mean about the burglary," said Rich-

ard, turning very red. "Oh that was, of course, a joke! You don't suppose that George was telling that story, even if it ever happened, of himself."

"If he wasn't, he ought not to be a game-keeper," returned Mr. Greene, gravely; "he ought to give his attention exclusively to writing fiction. If that was not a fragment of autobiography, 'call me horse:' and you know how little I think of the horse."

"What ridiculous prejudice!" returned the other, with irritation. "Why, supposing for a moment that the thing was auto—whatever you call it—do you suppose that the man would be such an idiot as to tell it to you?"

"My dear boy, George Parkes is not an idiot—very far from it; but not only does he not entertain the same view of morality as other people, but he hardly knows what their view is. No doubt there was a little bravado—and more gin-and-water—in his frankness, but he had no idea that he was—My jingo" (here he burst into a fit of laughter), "think of his telling such a story as that to your father!"

"Well, he wouldn't do it, of course. I am, moreover, quite sure it was only his fun."

"But if it *wasn't* his fun! If Mr. George Parkes has been at one time, as the police call it, 'a thief, or a companion of thieves'—what then?"

"That is what I say," answered Richard, vehemently—"what then? A man may go to the dogs at one time, I suppose, and yet come back again."

"No, Richard," said the other, thoughtfully, "the dogs won't let him do that; they will be always at his heels, believe me—especially at this man's heels," added Mr. Greene, with an irresistible impulse, "because he's a game-keeper."

Richard laughed aloud; not so much because he was tickled by the joke, as to relieve himself from a sense of oppression—his friend's words had gone deeper than Greene himself had imagined, but half the force of them had been thrown away by his ill-timed pleasantry.

"Oh, George is all right now, you may take your oath, Tommy," said Richard, lightly. "If it wasn't so, I should not be thinking of you-know-what so seriously. And, indeed, between ourselves, Lucy is such a trump that in that case she would not be thinking of it either. She and I have had some talk about this very matter. She would think that her love would disgrace me, if—if—her step-father should 'break out' into his old ways."

"I like her for that," said Greene, simply; but he added to himself, "I don't like her phrase of 'breaking out,' though; it is only used for drunkards and jail-birds."

"Yes, and you will like everything about her when you come to know her. And as for George, the old fellow is now as straight as a die."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE INWARD STRUGGLE.

It could not be said that Mr. Greene was "all things to all men" for the sake of any great end, but so far as that apostolic gift itself was concerned, this young gentleman undoubtedly possessed it. An invincible tendency toward droll-

ery would at times break out and imperil established relations, but, as a rule, he got on even with the gravest persons. With hypocrites he could no more mix than oil with water, and, indeed, like chemicals which have no affinity, when they met one another, there was generally an explosion; but so long as a man was genuine, he was rarely offended with Leonard Greene. The worst of this was, that serious people would sometimes entertain hopes of him when there was really no hope.

The Rev. Giles Freeman was one of those who fell into this snare. That good man perceived that this young gentleman was given to lightness, and flattered himself that he could supply him with ballast; and though Mr. Pole had warned him that the rector would "talk a dog's tail off," Mr. Greene, like a lamb (albeit a very frolicsome one), submitted to the well-meant ministrations of the shepherd. Mr. Freeman had not forgotten that young M. de Blaise had left Durnton as good (or bad) a Papist as he had come there; and if an opportunity lost can never be recovered, it certainly makes one keep a sharp lookout next time. Mr. Greene had in controversy expressed an admiration for Miss Talbot's character, founded, of course, on what he had heard of her from her nephew; it had had no reference to her opinions—unless the phrase, "a regular trump," could be held so to apply—but any text suffices for a good preacher.

"Miss Talbot is, as you imply, by nature a good woman—if any person can be called by nature good," was the rector's reply, "but unhappily she is in the Cimmerian darkness of spiritual error."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Greene. It was his way of expressing astonishment, and merely meant, "You don't say so?" but its effect upon strangers was sometimes unfavorable. It was so in this case.

"You are speaking in jest, I trust, Mr. Greene. You cannot seriously believe these errors to be of no consequence." It was only by being a patient listener to the rector's eloquence for the next twenty minutes that Mr. Greene atoned for his imprudence, and felt that he had reached level ground again.

Then he began to make way in the other direction.

"You were speaking of extreme unction, Mr. Freeman" (the rector had been speaking of everything relating to the Romish faith), "which reminds me of an anecdote connected with that ceremony. It is not thought right among the very High-church Catholics that any person having received that sacrament, on what, of course, is supposed to be his death-bed, should ever recover: the same sort of feeling, I suppose, that is entertained by doctors when they have given one over, with a religious objection added—it is flying in the face of the Church. When the luggage is labelled, it must go by the train, and should not be removed from the platform."

The rector smiled. He was not averse to "ridicule when alloyed on the side of truth."

"Well, it so happened that several persons in the Sacred City were sacrilegious enough to recover after they had received this last attention, and scandalized the faithful by mixing with the world again like common men. A secret socie-

ty was therefore instituted among some young gentlemen of extreme ecclesiastical opinions to put a stop to this bad practice. They visited the sick—not quite in the usual sense, though it was for their good, but with the object of making sure of persons supposed to be in *extremis*. When the last consolations of the Church had been administered to any one, they polished him off."

"This is worse than anything I could ever have imagined!" said the rector, with pleasurable excitement.

"Fact, I assure you. All went as merry as a funeral knell for some time, only it presently happened that one of this excellent body fell sick himself and was given over by the physicians. Then the priest came to administer the last rite; and while he was about it, the patient lifted up his eyes and saw a friend of his (whom he knew had something in his pocket for him) looking on through a crack in the door."

"Serve him right," said the rector, parenthetically.

"No doubt," assented Mr. Greene; "but that was not the sick man's view of the matter. He whispered to the priest, 'Don't leave me, and send for a policeman.' His wishes were obeyed, and he told everything. He blew on the society, and it burst up. It was allowed that its intentions were good, but that the carrying out of them led to inconvenience."

"A most interesting and significant example of the evils of priestcraft," said Mr. Freeman, gravely; and he made a note of the anecdote, to be used for the edification of his congregation when the narrator should be far away.

By this simple means Mr. Greene—who had an eye for such short cuts—found the shortest road to the good opinion of the rector; and similarly he succeeded more or less in ingratiating himself with the other good folks at Durnton, not excepting the squire himself.

Singularly enough, this social success of his, though Richard, under any other circumstances, would have been proud of his friend's achievements in that way, did not bring the two young gentlemen into more intimate relations. When one's school friend has come to one's house, and been introduced to one's people, and made a favorable impression, the bonds of friendship are generally drawn tighter, and confidential relations more clearly established. But Richard withheld his confidence as regarded matters relating to his "beloved object," and for this very reason, that Leonard Greene got on so well with the squire and the rest. He had, from the first, as we have seen, opposed himself to Richard's wishes, and the footing he had obtained in the family seemed to that young gentleman like an alliance with the enemy, to be used perhaps to his own detriment. Thus, much of the usefulness which had been expected from his stay at the Tower was denied to Mr. Greene; while his arguments, now that Richard held him as an irreconcilable, probably did that young gentleman more harm than good. But, on the other hand, his presence at Durnton was of incalculable service in diverting the young squire's attention, and preventing him from brooding over that hope deferred which makes the heart sick—and especially lovesick. What he would have done, even as matters were, had not Lucy herself en-

joined him to patience, it is hard to say; for he had not a soul to confide in concerning the subject which chiefly occupied his thoughts—a very dangerous condition of affairs for any lad when that subject is a young woman.

He had carried out his intentions of writing to Lucy; and a portion of the contents of the letter, especially the phrase, "I am always yours, and shall remain so forever"—which had perhaps been framed for that purpose, just as a dexterous (and favorable) critic will insert a few passages for newspaper quotation—had been shown to Miss Talbot; and she had replied, as agreed upon, by proxy.

"MY DEAR RICHARD,—I have seen a part of your letter to Lucy. She bids me to thank you for it, and to say that she reciprocates your regard. At the same time, she sees the justice of giving you a fair and clear opportunity of knowing your own mind in so important a matter. I think of her so highly, that if she could measure the extent of the misfortune which would befall you in case your wishes were accomplished, I feel sure she would give you up. Your heart, too, Richard, is so sound, that if you would consult it on this question, soberly, and without passion, I am confident that you would not oppose yourself to your father's authority, and to the advice of all who love you, among whom, be sure, is your affectionate aunt, EDITH TALBOT.

"P.S.—Do not suppose I do not see much to admire in your fidelity; but, alas! I can only say of it that it is worthy of a better cause."

This letter Richard generously placed in the rector's hands, because he knew that he would show it to the squire, and naturally concluded that it would cause him to regard Edith with kinder eyes. Perhaps, too, though so opposed to his own views, he thought it would at least place Lucy's character in a good light, while at the same time it treated his passion with a seriousness which his father had all along denied to it. As it happened, it had not any of the desired effects.

"Edith is parleying with him, Freeman," said the squire, angrily, when he read this epistle. "She should have told him that he was mad and wicked. The idea of the woman's saying that she admired his fidelity!—admired his fidelsticks!"

"My dear Talbot, that is just because she is a woman. For my part, I think the letter does her great credit. Her opinions are, of course, abominable, but she wishes well to you and yours, and will do all in her power to help you."

The squire uttered an ejaculation of contempt, but, nevertheless, the rector fancied he had been moved. If he had seen him during the next half-hour, as he paced the room alone with his own thoughts, that suspicion would have been more than corroborated. He had retained the letter, and was holding it in his hand. "The advice of all who love you, among whom, be sure, am I," he kept repeating to himself. "Well, perhaps she does love him; what then? She loves others better, and at least regards their interests with greater solicitude. And in this particular case she may be honest—honest;" here he stopped, as though the word had suggested another train of thought. "Yes, I was honest; I did not

merely do it for the best; I did not do what I thought evil that good might come of it. I did right for right's sake. It was mine by rights, and this woman is a Jesuit, or, if not, she is in the hands of Jesuits, from whom may Heaven defend us!"

He spoke with earnest gravity, without a touch of passion, though it was plain his very soul was stirred within him.

Most great thinkers—those their opponents call freethinkers—are almost always men who from an early age have thought for themselves.

"They fought their doubt and gathered strength;
They would not make their judgments blind;
They faced the spectres of the mind,
And laid them."

or very nearly laid them (they scarcely do so quite). And similarly our great believers are those who have applied their minds from an early age to spiritual matters, and strengthened their faith by study. Our bigots, on the other hand, have usually done their thinking (what little there has been of it) late in life. They have come suddenly upon something which seems to them a novelty, and even a peculiar revelation; they are attracted to it by an irresistible force, and its contrary has always the attraction of repulsion. The admirable witticism which defines dogmatism as grown-up puppyism is true to the core in politics; and in theology the fact is somewhat similar. Francis Talbot had been no puppy, but he had been an ignorant, dissolute, and thoughtless man until the sudden change had come upon him which had transformed him to—a bigot. From that moment, notwithstanding that much of good had thereby accrued to him, the springs of right and justice had been stifled within him, but they were not extinct; he felt them now rising with force and vigor, and the natural ties of blood were working with them; the struggle between these allies and his second nature was more severe than it had ever been. It was his wont, on occasions of doubt and perplexity—on much less important ones than the present—to appeal upon his knees to Heaven for guidance; but this he did not do now: he did not dare to do it, nor did he venture to ask himself why it was he did not dare. In the end, that second nature of his held its own; the door in his heart that he had shut against his sister was not forced; but lock and hinge had suffered in the assault, and were somewhat weakened, though it still showed its old grim front. The inward struggle, too, had cost the squire dear. As when two armies contend within some neutral district, the flocks and herds are slain, the crops destroyed, and nature's bounty for years to come is rendered profitless, so it was with Francis Talbot when the stronger of the two contending powers of his soul had won the day. Their battle-field—himself—was left well-nigh desolate, and robbed of years of life.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MR. PARKES BECOMES IMPATIENT.

If the policy of Richard's friends with respect to his unfortunate attachment could not be said to be crowned with success, it had certainly been thus far successful, that no immediate danger was to be apprehended; if there were no visible

signs of the young gentleman's recovery, there were evidences, as time went on, that he had begun to think of other things than the beloved object. He was interested in the going to Cambridge in the October term, where he was to be at the same college as Leonard Greene. The latter young gentleman having consented to remain at the Tower, there was no disruption of continuity in their relations with one another, and the university and its ways became a topic of interest between them that never palled.

"When he once gets there," said Greene to the rector, confidently, "I believe he will forget all about the girl."

"Especially if he would only form a virtuous attachment," urged Mr. Freeman, reverting to his panacea.

"I cannot undertake to provide him with *that*," answered the other, secretly convulsed with mirth; "but we will do the best we can for him. I should not recommend him to read too much. When fellows read, their attention is so easily diverted. They are naturally glad to let their book drop and think of anything else."

"I hope that is not the usual experience," said the rector, dryly.

"Well, one speaks as one finds, you know. In Talbot's case, I think a daily plunge in the quiet pool—it's only a shilling pool—would be more beneficial."

"Let him bathe, by all means," answered the rector, innocently; "whether he pays a shilling or a guinea is of no sort of consequence."

"Just so," assented the other, stolidly. "This man, who does not even know what 'pool' is, will some day be my death," he added to himself. "I shall burst, and nobody will ever know that I have perished for my friend."

The aims of these two young gentlemen as to their educational course were identical, which was of itself a bond between them. They had neither of them the most distant intention of "reading," in the university sense. They meant to get their degrees, of course—Mr. Greene's guardian, indeed, had stipulated for that when he placed him at college—but their primary object was to enjoy themselves. Richard, of course, had his Lucy to think about; but the prospect of unlimited boating, and billiards, and going out with the drag ("You can do *that* if you're fool enough," said Mr. Greene), began to have considerable attractions for him.

Without directly expressing any opinion upon the matter—once only, indeed, after that first time, did he open his lips even to the rector upon the subject of Lucy Lindon—the squire was understood to be well satisfied with the state of affairs. His health, it was now become obvious to all eyes, was very far from what it should be, and to Richard formed some excuse for his continued reticence and sombre manner. When the time came for the lads to go to college, he exhibited an unwonted feeling on parting with his son.

"You will be a good man: you will do nothing, I feel sure, to disgrace yourself—nor your father. God bless you, dear boy!" were his last words.

Richard understood their significance well enough; but though he felt them to be an infringement of the truce agreed upon, he did not object to them. Doubtless his father's pale face

and hollow eyes had their effect upon him, and also the knowledge that his maintenance at college had been provided for with almost imprudent liberality. There had been some discussion on this matter between the rector and the squire, the former suggesting that too great a command of funds might be a temptation to the lad to follow his own bent as regarded Lucy; but the other had rejected that idea with scorn.

"My boy may be headstrong, and very foolish, but he is a gentleman; he will never make use of his father's generosity to defy his father's wishes."

And Mr. Greene, who was also consulted, concurred.

"There is no baseness about your boy, sir," said he to the squire, simply.

Nor was there any, in spite of those little affairs in connection with the head-master of Eton, and the pawnbroker in Windsor.

All Richard's friends, in fact, were in good hope of him, save one. Mr. George Parkes was very far from pleased that Richard had proved so tractable, and had even ventured to express his disappointment to the young gentleman himself.

"I did think, Master Richard, as you had had more pluck in you than to be talked over by a parcel of parsons and people who only want our Lucy to slip through your fingers. And it's likely enough she will slip through, if you go shilly-shallying after her like this. It ain't the sort of way a girl likes to be treated," said he, with an air of experience that was doubtless not unwarranted by facts.

"Well, what would you have me do?" Richard had answered, with irritation. He knew that the man had private ends to serve in whatever advice he had to offer: but, strange to say, in George's presence he always felt himself, as it were, nearer to Lucy, and more inclined to regard his project as practicable. The "parsons and people" were not without their suspicion of this; but to dismiss George from Durnton was considered dangerous, as likely to precipitate matters.

"What would I have ye do? Why, act like a man," he replied; "not like a child as is afraid of the birch. If I'd been in your place, she should ha' been Mrs. Richard Talbot afore this."

"Yes, but you are *not* in my place," answered Richard, striking the hedge-row with his stick (they were talking together in the little lane that led down to the spinney cottage and nowhere else, which made it well adapted for private conversation); "that is just the point which you lose sight of. There are considerations in my case which you don't understand, but which must needs have their weight with me."

"That is very fine; but I don't think it is your own notion, Master Richard," observed Mr. Parkes, dryly. "You allow things of that sort to be put into your mouth, though when there is a sweet, pretty cherry bobbing against your very lips, you haven't the courage to swallow it. The matter is your affair, not mine; but I should like to have seen you happy with the girl of your choice, and now I perceive that will never be."

"Ah, like the rest, then—notwithstanding you pretend to believe I love her—you think I shall forget Lucy when I get to college. I am told I have only got to look about me to see scores of pretty girls as nice as she."

"No, I don't think you'll forget her, Master Richard," answered the other, quietly; "and I am quite sure you will find no one at college, or anywhere else, to hold a candle to her as to beauty and that; but I do think there is great danger of her forgetting *you*. A woman's a woman, even though she may be the best of her sex; and the suitor at her side has always a pull over the lover at a distance, especially if he don't even write to her. It is true that your separation is Lucy's own arrangement; but then there are some things in which a girl likes a man to show a spirit even in opposition to her wishes: a pretty girl says, 'Don't,' when she wants you most to kiss her. And so, in spite of her prudence, I am afraid Lucy is growing a little impatient."

"How do you know?" inquired Richard, sharply.

"Well, that's neither here nor there: perhaps I don't know, but have only my suspicions. But what I do know is that she could already take her pick of half a dozen young fellows—ay, and young gentlemen, too—for half London is wild about her beauty. And though she don't encourage 'em—not a bit of it—yet—"

"Well, what?" struck in the lad, impatiently.

"Well, all I means to say is that if I intended to make that girl my wife, Master Richard, I should look sharp about it."

No more definite statement than this could be extracted from Mr. George Parkes: his warning remained dark as a sibyl's; but it had at least part of its intended effect, inasmuch as it made Richard exceedingly uncomfortable, and greatly dashed the pleasure with which he looked forward to his college life.

Strongly as Mr. Parkes had stated his views upon this affair, and often as he repeated them during the next three months, he was neither so vehement nor so importunate in the matter as he would have been had he only dared. He liked Richard as well, perhaps, as any other person besides himself; but then his self-love, like Eclipse in the race, was first, and the rest nowhere; the other likings were distanced—out of sight. Or if such an image, though classical, may offend the straitlaced, let us take a mathematical one. His self-love was integer one—distinctly No. 1—and all his other loves and likings in the tenth place, or worse, among the decimals.

One of the many characteristics that would have fitted the man to take a lead in the world, had nature but given him a good start, was his inordinate selfishness, to which all other things and persons were subordinate in his own mind—only unhappily they could not always be made so with the strong hand; his sovereign will lacked subjects, and, therefore, was compelled to dissemble. Mr. Parkes had certain private reasons—pressing ones—besides those which were obvious to all acquainted with the case, why the two young people in whom he took such a fatherly interest should be irrevocably united to one another, and the young squire's lukewarmness or pusillanimity disgusted him. He was secretly full of contempt of him; for, putting himself in his place, he felt that he would have acted so very differently, and with complete success, so far as the present gratification was concerned, beyond which he never looked. This contempt, however, he dared not disclose to the object of it;

but had to confine himself to expressing it to his wife, which was some comfort, because he knew it distressed her.

"This white-livered foster-son of yours," he would observe, between the whiffs of his pipe, "has not the pluck of a —," mentioning a diminutive insect seldom seen and as seldom spoken of in polite circles. "He has no more backbone in him than a jelly-fish."

"He has been always very kind to me," the poor woman would plaintively reply.

"Kind to *you*! There you are again with your infernal selfishness! Who the deuce cares" (only he personified the evil principle of the schoolmen, and even mentioned the locality in which it is supposed to abide)—"who cares about his kindness? The point is, why don't he marry the girl? I'm her natural guardian, and have the right to insist upon it. And why don't I?"

Poor Mrs. Parkes knew very well why he didn't—namely, that if he did, the whole affair would be at once knocked on the head, instead of dying a natural death (as she felt sure it would do); but, though weak in character, she was not so foolish as to express this opinion. Experience had at least taught her reticence.

"Well, George, you don't wish to be hard upon poor Master Richard, I'm sure, or make a breach between him and his father."

"Yes, that's it; I'm too soft-hearted," said Mr. Parkes, with a reflective air. "Some men would have had his blood for not behaving honorable long ago."

Mrs. Parkes shuddered, for her husband's face wore an expression so truculent that it was like an illustration to his words.

"There's nothing for it, George, but patience," said she, soothingly.

"Patience! Yes, but perhaps there isn't time for patience!" exclaimed the game-keeper, passionately. But the moment the words had passed his lips, he repented of them. Whatever reasons he might have for hurrying matters on, he felt that he must not confide them to the wife of his bosom. "I mean, lass," he added, in gentler tones, "that the young squire's going to college may be the ruin of the whole affair. 'Out of sight, out of mind,' is a true proverb, and never truer than in the case of a boy's love. Now, are you sure you have done your best with Lucy?"

"I have written everything you told me to write, George," answered she, humbly.

"And did you say that you wrote it of yourself—that I did not dictate it to you with a horsewhip in my hand—eh?"

And his dark face fixed itself on hers with menacing significance.

"Of course I said I wrote it of myself, George. If—if—Lucy didn't believe it, that was not my fault."

"Yes, it was. If she had not known you to be such a puling milk-and-water sort of nature, she *would* have believed it. There's some women as I have known who, if they had been in your place, would have got this matter settled off-hand. But *you*—"

Words sufficiently indicative of his supreme contempt for Mrs. Parkes's weakness of character here failed him, and he relieved his feelings by spitting in the fire.

"I don't know how that girl ever came to be a daughter of yours," he went on, in a low growl,

almost as much canine as human; "*she's* got enough spirit in her—*bad* spirit—for a dozen women. Hang it, if I don't sometimes think you must have played Willie Lindon false, and that Lucy never could have been his bairn; for he was a soft, foolish, feckless creature, just like yourself."

"Willie was always very kind to me," answered the poor woman, with a red spot on either cheek, which was the nearest approach she dared to make to the expression of indignation. At the same time two tears coursed slowly down her pale cheeks.

Mr. Parkes watched them with contemptuous interest, as he would have looked on a race between two "screws" which it was not worth his while to bet about.

"Ah! everybody was kind to you, of course, except your present husband. I wish Lindon had been a little kinder, and stopped on in the world."

With which benevolent aspiration he rose from his seat, and, taking up his gun, went about his professional duties.

Even there, however, he could not forget the subject of his trouble.

"As for Lucy," he muttered, as he strode along, "I could shoot the girl as soon as look at her; indeed sooner, for I hate the sight of her disdainful face. What a chance that girl has had of benefiting herself and her family! Strike me blind, if I can tell what she means by such mad folly! Here's the young squire ready to jump into her arms, and she says, 'No; let him stop a bit, and see whether he doesn't like somebody else better.' I run risk enough, Heaven knows, but, then, I'm obliged to do it; but she is running hers without any reason for it, when there is every reason that tongue can frame why she shouldn't run it. And yet there was a time when she was wiser. She listened to me eagerly enough, I could see, though she strove to hide it, when I told her how the banns matter could be managed. Yet, though she has snared her game, she won't so much as stoop to pick it up and put it in her bag. And now it's ten to one that the string won't hold, at all events not long enough for my purpose. Gar! I could wring her neck like a partridge's, and like the job!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ON THE "SCREEN."

I HAVE heard from the lips of a sporting philosopher the pursuit of pleasure compared with that of the fox, to join in which we trod along in high spirits, and take part in the run with great delight; but afterward, when the fox has been killed a *great way from home*, we ride back through the gathering dusk wearily and drearily enough. But the road to cover is very pleasant (in some cases even better than the rest of the proceedings, for the day may be a "blank" one), and especially to those who are well mounted and have nothing but their sport to think about, as was Richard Talbot's case. To one in his position the university affords almost unalloyed delight, the inconveniences of "chapel" and "lectures" being so small that they are hardly worth mentioning; all faces are friendly

to him, all hands stretched forth in welcome; and if dull care is really behind the horseman, it is out of sight, and in that glorious noonday throws no shadow before him. Richard felt the poetry of existence without knowing it, and took the goods wherewith the gods provided him without any sense of obligation.

His undergraduate life did not run on the same broad gauge as that of his friend, who had a taste for light literature, and belonged to what has been irreverently termed the "gin-punch and Shelley" set; but they often met, and when they did not, so great were the attractions of the place for both that they did not greatly miss one another. They had a common junction, however, in the amateur actors' society, to which Talbot had been introduced by Greene, who was one of its leading members. He had an idea that he had the "dramatic faculty," and had offered the society more than one piece of his own composition—which they had declined to act. On the occasion of these rejections he was very unhappy for the day, though on the morrow he forgot all about it. Richard, who experienced no rejections, was always in high spirits. It must be confessed that he thought less and less of his Lucy daily; and so far the chief object which his friends had had in view in sending him to Cambridge was attained. If that first term of his had been a long one, their success might perhaps have been complete; or if, even at its conclusion, they had sent him to "Paris, Vienna, or Munich," he might have returned quite heart-whole. But when Alma Mater released him from his arduous studies, and he came back to Durnton Regis for the Christmas vacation, and without his friend, then, as might have been expected, he at once experienced a relapse. If home had been dull before, it was far duller now by contrast with the excitements of college; while the chief recreation within his reach was that of shooting, of which he partook, of course, in company with Mr. George Parkes, game-keeper. Strangely enough, however, he had now become reticent on the subject of Lucy, and Richard was the first to speak about her.

"Have you heard," inquired he, as they were standing together at the corner of a wood on their first day with the pheasants—"have you heard any news, George, from Ford's Alley lately?"

"Yes, I've heard a many things; but I don't mean to talk about 'em. It seems, Master Richard, that you and I have agreed to differ upon that subject altogether, and therefore I think we'd better let it alone."

And, with a grunt, the game-keeper slowly moved away, like a man who bears a grievance. Nevertheless, at various times he allowed hints to escape him which were as fuel to the young gentleman's amorous flame. Lucy, it appeared, was more beautiful than ever, and, though she sung divinely, was sought after for her beauty quite as much as her vocal gifts. She was true as steel, no doubt, but girls were but girls, and were liable to have their heads turned by flattery and incense. In a couple of months or so, it was true, some communication might be allowed *between her and her lover*; but four months had *already elapsed*, and so prolonged a silence was *—in the midst, too, of so much temptation—a*

great trial to a girl's fidelity. Moreover, even when the six months were over, there was no guarantee of any sort that she would be allowed to meet him; in fact, it was certain that new obstacles would be interposed. Mr. Parkes, for his part, had no patience to speak of it, though Master Richard seemed fortunately endowed with a superabundance of that virtue. When he, Mr. Parkes, was a young fellow, he had some spirit in him— But there, he had said his say long ago, and there was no use in chatter.

It was very creditable to Mr. Parkes's self-control that he discussed the matter in this diplomatic and cynical style; for the reasons, already hinted at, that had been so pressing upon him with respect to the union of the young couple were becoming more importunate than ever.

It was arranged between the game-keeper and the young squire that on the first favorable night they should have "a shot at the ducks," as the former expressed it, or, in other words, shoot wild-fowl on the Dorn. The opportunity soon afterward arrived, on an evening which promised a clear moonlight with a gentle breeze, and at the appointed hour Richard set out for the little quay, where he was to meet Mr. Parkes with his punt. The time had been fixed by the latter, as being propitious for the purpose—when the birds should be, as he termed it, "on their last legs;" that is, when the incoming tide should be flowing over the ooze, except here and there, where, on spots a little elevated, the birds were delaying till the water should compel them to take wing; and Richard, as usual when pleasure was in prospect, was before his time.

Nevertheless, no one was stirring in the village as he came through it at the double, and well wrapped up, for the wind was high and very cold; nor on the little jetty was any one to be seen except the man who was expecting him.

"I am glad you are early, Master Richard," said George, with whom the force of habit was so strong that he still addressed his companion by that boyish title, though he had so strong an interest in persuading him that he was of mature years. "It is a bitter night, and one might just as well have something to keep the cold out before we start."

He led the way to a small shed which stood at the end of the jetty, and which afforded at least shelter from the wind, which was driving toward the sea, and pulled out a case-bottle from his top-coat. "There, take a nip of that."

Richard did so, nothing loath; for, in spite of the pace at which he had come, his teeth chattered like castanets.

"That's good brandy," said he; "where did you get it?"

"Ask no questions, and you'll hear no lies, Master Richard," answered the other, grimly. "One should never look a gift cask in the bung-hole. Take one more drop—just one. Now, listen to me: I've got something to tell you."

"About Lucy?" said Richard, quickly.

"Yes, about Lucy. She's sick and tired of waiting for you, and she's written to say so."

"Who to?" cried Richard, regardless of grammar.

"To you."

"To me? I don't believe it—that is, where is the letter?"

"You don't believe it? You will, though, if

seeing's believing, for here it is. And yet it ain't a letter, neither; it's just a scrap—only a few words; but such words! And yet I don't know whether I ought to show them to you, for fear you should do something rash."

"No, no; I won't do that. You are the last man to complain of my want of prudence."

"Yes, but this is so great a temptation. To think that—if you cared to do it—you might see her this very night, clasp her in your arms, and not part from her until you were married—and then never part. I know that when I was a young fellow, had such a chance presented itself I should have jumped at it; and I fear that even you, Master Richard, though you seem so cold-blooded—"

"Let me see it," put in Richard, huskily.

"Let me see her letter;" and he held out his trembling hand.

"Well, I've got it somewheres about me, I know. Here, take the lantern—hold it steady or I shall never find it, for it is, as I told you, but a scrap."

Here he began to fumble in his pockets, while Richard watched him as a hungry dog watches his master suck a bone.

The lantern was not of the kind commonly used by the game-keeper class, but a very neat "dark" one, and when the shield was slipped it threw a strong light upon any object; but in poor Richard's shaking hands the light wandered about like a will-o'-the-wisp, nor could he fix it upon the scrap of paper which Mr. Parkes now held before him.

"Give me the lantern, Master Richard," said that gentleman, in a tone in which contempt and conventional respect were strangely mingled, "and I'll hold the paper for you."

It was a picture worthy of a good draughtsman, to see the tall, hairy giant thus engaged, and peering above the lantern at his young friend with a fierce, anxious look; while Richard, with pale face and eager eyes, perused the writing. It was Lucy's, without doubt; but it consisted only of a line or two, without address:

"I shall be at Swanborough—at the Crown—to-morrow afternoon. Pray be there to meet me. Yours ever lovingly, LUCY LINDON.

"Monday."

The boy's face flushed crimson.

"She wrote on Monday," he said; "then she is there now?"

The game-keeper nodded. "Of course she is; waiting for you."

"But how did you come by this? Why is it not addressed to me?"

"Because of your ridiculous scruples—either hers or yours—about writing to one another. She promised not to write to you, did she not? So she encloses this slip in a note to me. She says to me: 'I find I have overrated my strength; I cannot live without dear Richard'—or words to that effect. She wants you to join her at Swanborough, and go to London. She has secured lodgings for you in the city, while she will remain at Ford's Alley till the banns can be published; and then you will be married hard and fast. As for the money that will be necessary, I've got it in my pocket, Master Richard, and it is very much at your service. You can pay me any day."

And he produced a canvas bag of considerable size, and chinked the gold within it.

Richard took it mechanically; thanks to the brandy and the excitement of his feelings, he scarcely knew what he was about.

"I shall start at once," said he, quickly; "you must lend me your horse and trap."

"Not I," said Mr. Parkes, with decision. "I have got myself to look to as well as you, Master Richard. You must start from your own stable upon this errand, and after our night's work is done. There must seem to be no collusion between us. That is why I have kept Lucy's note till now; I felt that you might do something rash, else. As long as you are in time for the night mail from Swanborough, it will be all right. Lucy will go by that train."

The game-keeper spoke with the quiet calm of a master of the situation. It would have been evident to any disinterested listener that the suggested plan had been fixed upon beforehand, and not without calculation. The deep but clear voice, the steady gaze that looked straight into Richard's eyes—not, indeed, with the frankness of truth, but with a hardihood that defied suspicion—all spoke of premeditation. His companion, however, saw nothing of this. Trembling with passion and excitement, and flushed with the unaccustomed and potent liquor, he only beheld in Mr. Parkes a clear-sighted and sagacious adviser, and felt the need of his assistance. He kept repeating to himself, "I shall be at Swanborough to-morrow; pray be there to meet me," as though it were some magic charm, and indeed, in his case, it had all the reputed virtues of a love philter.

The scrap of paper on which the words were written he had taken from the other's hand, though not altogether with his good-will, and placed in his breast-pocket, next his heart. He had no more chance of resisting this man's will than clay would have in a contention with iron; but he was not conscious that he was obeying his will.

"Come, Master Richard, we are losing time; let's get into the punt; and don't you meddle with the guns till the time comes, for this chill breeze makes the hand shake." These weapons were in the bottom of the boat, which was a flat-bottomed one, but by no means large. When Richard took his seat in it, and his companion the oars, the latter almost touched him with his hands when he came forward for the stroke. In spite, therefore, of the force of the wind, they could converse together without raising their voices so as to alarm their game. The ripple of the waves darkened the dull stream, and the oozes on both sides looked almost inky black; but the shallows shone in the moonlight with a silvery brightness, and on that "white water," as it is termed, the birds would presently stand out in strong relief.

"Have your eyes about you, Master Richard; you are not keeping a good lookout."

"I am not thinking of the birds, George. I care nothing about shooting to-night."

"Ah, but you should. Life is short, and every moment of it should be enjoyed when we can. Besides, it will make the time pass quickly that must elapse before you see your Lucy. You must be with me for a couple of hours. Then you will go home with me, so that Annie may see us part

company; and after that I don't know what becomes of you. You will take your mare, I suppose; she is the quickest on her legs."

Richard nodded; he had already made up his mind to take the mare.

"Pray be there to meet me," the note had said. Yes, he would be there, though late. His honor, his word, his filial resolutions, were all scattered to the winds; the sudden temptation, as Mr. Parkes had foreseen, had quite overmastered him.

"Hark, Master Richard, hark!"

On the wings of the breeze was borne to them that soft and confused noise, sometimes compared with distant rain, which is the whistling or "charming" of the widgeon. The banks on both sides were growing very low, but straight in front of them, and in the centre of the river, was a huge shining something, which was an isolated mud-bank; and on this, their last foothold, the birds were standing.

"There they are, I'll bet a crown," said George, in a hoarse whisper. "We must keep away till the tide is a little higher; it is rising very fast, though the wind is dead against. Here, just take the oars while I land at yonder screen and take a look up the river."

The "screen" was a low sea-wall or break-water, over which the tide ran several feet at its highest, but which still stood out above the inky flood. There was firm ground beneath it, and, as George very well knew, the water would not yet reach to his knees, which were amply protected by wading-boots. His purpose was, therefore, to conceal himself behind this object, and from thence to make his observations.

"You have not got your mud-pattens on," observed Richard. This was a precaution which, with one other—"Never let both persons leave the punt together"—had been instilled into him from the first time he had ever gone duck-shooting by the game-keeper himself.

"Pattens are of no use here, Master Richard; the mud is fifty feet away. Steady, while I get out—Damnation!"

His foot, as he leaped out, had struck the oar next the screen, and forced it out of the rowlock. The next instant the boat was whirling round and round toward the sea, past all Richard's power of guidance; while his companion was left clinging to the screen, with the water rising round him three inches to the minute. With the usual carelessness of his class, the game-keeper, though so frequently on the river, had never learned to swim; he used to grimly say that those who were born for another fate had no need to do so; but had he been ever so good a swimmer, to escape over the mud-banks, even should he reach them, would have been hopeless without his pattens. This horrible reflection now monopolized Richard's mind, even to the exclusion of his own safety, about which he might well have been apprehensive. The boat, caught broadside by the wind, which had grown higher than ever, was being slowly driven seaward against the tide, and the black, curling waves had already forced their way into it. There was a hole at the stern for propelling the boat upon the screw system, and Richard strove to put his remaining oar to that use, but his *expert hands could get no way on her. And all the time was ringing in his ears a passionate cry,*

not so much of fear as of anguish, from his late companion, "Boat, boat! Help, help!" which mingled with the wind itself, and seemed to give it voice.

Breathless and perspiring, though the cold of the night air was intense, the boy battled on, with furious but ill-directed efforts; and yet to his ear reproaches seemed to mix with these cries for succor. To Parkes, no doubt, had their situations been reversed, it would have been possible, though difficult, to force the punt in the desired direction. "Help! Boat! Back, back! Don't desert me, Master Richard! I drown, I drown!" The water was at the man's knees when he left the boat; it must now be at his thighs; and now at his middle. He would get on the wall, no doubt, but that would only prolong his agonies, if assistance should not come. And whence was it to come?

The punt had now drifted nearly to the village, and though not a light was to be seen, Richard gave forth shriek after shriek for aid. There was no answer save the shrill cry of the sea-gull, and the roar of the wind still bearing on its icy wings the victim's passionate appeal. All thought of Lucy had been utterly banished from Richard's mind, when suddenly there sprang up within him the recollection of that night when, boy and girl together, he and Lucy had crossed the Dorn to see the new light in that very Pharos which now stood up, dark and silent, like a monument of death, upon the eastern bank. Boy and girl they had been then, innocent playfellows; but now some contrasting thought was in his mind which made the remembrance bitter. Was it possible that that perishing man yonder had plotted the girl's ruin, and was he (Richard) himself to have been the instrument of it? Was not remorse as well as despair in those terrible cries, which would surely still ring in his ears so long as he had life to hear a sound? To his acute but morbid senses it indeed seemed so. Then another flash of memory shot into his mind: the little creek was somewhere on his left, where he and Lucy had found safety—not that he was looking for safety now, albeit his situation was most perilous, but for the means of invoking aid for another. By this time it was clear that he could never land on the river-bank next the village, from which, although the wind blew but aslant, such was its power that he never approached that side nearer than mid-stream; there seemed, indeed, to be something demoniacal in this wind, laden with its hideous sounds, and driving him back from his merciful purpose against the force of the tide; and yet—which added to its horror—he knew that, should it drop, the waters would pour in like a deluge, and drown their victim out of hand.

The only hope was now to get the punt into the little haven of which we have spoken, where by the light-house might be reached and help obtained from its keepers. To this end, therefore, Richard strained every nerve.

The waves were higher near the mouth of the river, but the forces of wind and tide were nearly equalized, so that he could direct his canoe with a little more accuracy than heretofore; but the creek was small, and the punt, by reason of its build, unwieldy, and exposed to the action both of wind and wave. When it was seized by the swirling eddies, it was whirled about in them

like a straw; but where the stream ran straight, he could turn its head, like a runaway horse, on which the desperate rider pulls a single rein in hopes to pull him round. As it was, Richard missed the creek; but as he was hurried by the jutting rock that formed it, he sprang out, and, finding foothold, reached the land, while his frail bark whirled on into the wintry sea without a tenant.

CHAPTER XXIX.

WIDOWED.

ON touching ground new vigor revived in Richard. To find himself master of his own movements was in itself, after all that vain toiling against the powers of wind and wave, an exhilarating fact; and it was with something more of hope than he had yet ventured to entertain that he set off at speed for the light-house. He had never visited it since that night—which now seemed part of another lifetime—when Lucy and he had sought admittance there; but it was quite unchanged. Neither storm nor spray had dulled its harsh, gray features; and the same man that had opened the narrow door to them now answered his hasty summons, and with an equally astonished air.

“Master Richard—*again*?”

“Yes. Get out your boat! lose not a moment!” (They were already running down to the spot where it was lying.) “George Parkes is on the screen—the first from here—and when I left him the tide was above his knees.”

“How long ago? Tell me all, while I am pulling for his life. I have no breath to lose. Jump in!”

In less time than it would have seemed possible to a landsman, the light-house wherry was on its way. The wind had slightly fallen, and the tide, now almost at full flood, naturally assisted their progress.

“George got out to have a look at some birds over the sea-wall, and in doing so kicked an oar away: then I was powerless to help him.”

The light-keeper nodded; he quite understood that; and he had his own views of Richard himself having reached land: he thought the fact next kin to a miracle.

“We parted, as far as I can judge—but I may be quite wrong, it seems an age—about half an hour ago.”

The light-house keeper shook his head, and bent to his work. Richard read in his face that they were too late.

“Look about you for him in the water,” gasped the other, presently.

Aghast with horror, the boy looked around him right and left. Nothing was to be seen but the dark tide, with here and there a white-tipped wave; the banks were covered; the last shoals had been swallowed up.

“I can see nothing,” answered he. “I cannot even see the screen, though we should surely be within sight of it by this time.”

“It is beneath us now,” answered the other, hoarsely. He had ceased rowing, and was keeping the wherry as stationary as was possible, with her head to the wind. Richard did not recognize the spot; the screen was nowhere to be seen; the mud island beyond had sunk; the

birds had long been on the wing. But he knew the man could not be mistaken.

“My God! where is he?”

“Farther up, for the tide has not yet turned. He will be down here presently, poor fellow!”

“What do you mean? Dead, drowned?”

“Ay, if he had a hundred lives to lose. What is this?”

Richard turned sick with horror, expecting to see the corpse of his late companion on the flood. It was, however, a comparatively small object, which, as it was whirled about close to his oar, the light-keeper dexterously seized and laid in the boat. It was the yellow water-proof cap, with a fall behind, that Parkes was accustomed to wear upon the river.

“You see I was right,” observed the man; “this is the eddy above the wall. If he had been a swimmer we might have picked him up. Poor George!”

They waited for nearly an hour, scanning the water narrowly on all sides. The cold was intense, and in spite of their excitement they felt it bitterly. If it had not been for the brandy he had swallowed, the boy would have fared ill indeed.

“We are being frozen to death,” said the light-keeper, presently. “It is no use for us to stop longer.”

“Nay, we cannot leave him here,” returned the boy, shuddering as much with awe as cold.

“He is not here, Master Richard. He is nigh the bar by this time. We shall find him at low tide to-morrow by the Dorn rocks.”

He spoke truth, for so it happened, and Richard felt that it must be so.

“I will put you ashore at the jetty. Perhaps you will go to the spinney cottage yourself, Master Richard. You know his people better than I.”

“I dare not!” said Richard. He felt utterly unequal to the task of meeting George’s widow alone. “But I will go if you will go with me.”

They started, therefore, together in silence, each seeking within himself for something to say in the way of comfort, and in vain.

From the little leafless lane the cottage could be seen at some distance, and, to their surprise, they noticed lights in more than one window. It was not Mrs. Parkes’s practice to sit up for her husband—who, indeed, was sometimes away all night on duty in the preserves; and yet now not only was there a light in her bedroom window, but also in that below-stairs. As they neared the porch, two men sprang out upon them and seized the light-keeper, and, before he could recover from his surprise, had slipped a pair of handcuffs on his wrists.

“George Parkes, I arrest you, in the Queen’s name,” cried one, “for burglary. Whatever you may say, I warn you, will be used at your trial—”

“George, George!” interposed an agonized voice from the upper window. “Speak to me, husband, for God’s sake, and tell me that you are innocent!”

“Go away with them into the lane and wait there,” whispered Richard to his companion. And the two men moved off with him willingly enough, for they had expected a most vehement resistance. The next moment Richard found himself face to face with his foster-mother.

"Oh, Master Richard, darling, tell me it is not true about dear George! He has done wrong a many times, but never, never committed a crime like this. Oh, ask them to let him go, or it will kill me!"

"Calm yourself, dear Annie," said Richard, gravely; "they will not do your husband any harm." This was true, at least, and the confidence of his tone seemed to give the poor woman comfort.

"I know you will stand by him, whatever happens," sobbed she, imploringly. "And I don't think what they have told me *could* have happened. Is it likely—is it possible—that my George should have committed such a crime, and in such a place?"

"What place, what crime, Annie?"

"They say that he broke into the Manor House—your friend Mr. Pole's own house—last night, when he was in your father's woods, I know, about his duties, till after daylight."

In an instant it flashed on Richard's mind that the excellent brandy of which he had partaken on the jetty must have come from Mr. Pole's own cellars (it was, in fact, from his own particular "sixty-year-old" bin); but his face only showed gentleness and compassion.

"Whatever has happened, Annie, we will do our best for you," he said.

"Then go after him now and bring him back. I have thought ill of him at times, but all that is over now. What should I, *should* I, do if he never should come back again? Go, go!" And she pushed him with all her feeble strength.

"Promise me to stay in-doors, and keep as calm as you can, Annie. I cannot bring him back again, indeed; but I will do my best for you," reiterated Richard.

It was a relief to him to get away, under any pretense, and he had a plan by this time in his mind.

In the lane he found the two policemen and their charge, who had already half convinced them of their mistake as to his identity.

Richard, in a few words, explained to them how matters stood.

"It is better so for him, master, bad as it seems," said one of them, "for he would otherwise have been 'a lifer.'"

Richard understood him at once.

"Did he use violence, then?"

"I believe you! One of Mr. Pole's footmen is done for, I understand; though he had sense enough come back to him this afternoon to swear to his man."

"You two belong to Masham, I suppose?" said Richard. "Here is a sovereign apiece for you" (he pulled out poor George's bag), "and don't say anything of what has occurred to our Durnton folk."

It was to Richard's credit that, up to the moment of George Parkes quitting the boat in that fatal manner, not one thought of self, nor of his own concerns, intruded itself upon his mind; and even now, when the worst was over, or at least known, and the reflection of how the consequences of the dead man's crime must need affect his relations with Lucy forced itself upon him, he still put the interests of the dead man—or, rather, of his belongings—before his own. *What he was about to do was to go to the rector and tell him all, and then send him down to the*

spinney to administer what comfort might be possible to poor Annie.

This was a step obviously injurious to himself; for he would have to acknowledge, tacitly or otherwise, his own belief in George's guilt; and what an opportunity would this afford Mr. Freeman to improve the occasion as respected Lucy! It would certainly have been better for him to let matters take their course, and give himself at least the chance of George's proving innocent; nor did it lay within his natural duties to fetch a clergyman to Annie. Nevertheless, since it seemed to him that this was the best thing to be done for her, he did it.

For many a year that night stood out in Richard's memory as a thing apart, a fragment of his life, yet of altogether a different substance to the rest of it; every incident of it marked as sharply as were the objects by the way-side as he ran upon his present errand along the moonlit road. It was the first time, for one thing, that he had been brought face to face with death; and wan, pale-sheeted death seemed to people the white fields around him. If his mission had not been one of urgency as well as duty, he might even have felt childish fear; but as it was, he was only awed and softened.

To his imperious summons at the Rectory door there was for some time no reply; but presently the window above it opened, and Mr. Freeman's voice inquired his name and errand.

"It is I, Richard Talbot. Poor George Parkes has been drowned in the Dorn."

"The Lord have mercy upon his soul!" ejaculated the rector, fervently, but with the desperation that supplicants use who have but faintest hopes. "Poor wretch! poor man! I will come down to you in a moment."

Then a smothered voice was heard in expostulation: "Madness, with your sore-throat! Giles, in such a night, what good can you possibly do, if the man is dead?"

Again the rector appeared at the window, this time with a stocking coiled about his neck.

"If I can be of any service, Richard, of course I'll come; but—"

"I think you can, sir. Something else has happened; the police have been down to the cottage after George. I am afraid there has been some bad business up at Masham Manor. And poor Annie, who does not even know she is a widow, is sadly in need of comfort."

"Poor soul, poor soul! Get away from the window, Giles!" cried a sharp, feminine voice. It's *me*, Richard"—Richard was not quite certain who "me" was at the moment, though reflection would, of course, have convinced him that it could be no other than Mrs. Freeman (a night-cap with a large fringe does, however, greatly tend to confuse identity). "This is *my* affair, my dear boy: it is woman's work to comfort women; and besides, Giles has such a bad throat. I will be down in a jiffy."

"You must not be hard upon Annie," murmured Richard, half to himself, his fear of the rector's wife and his tenderness for his foster-mother contending within him. Through the sharp, clear air the muffled words found their way to the ear to which they were addressed.

"Hard, dear boy! God forbid! I shall only think of her as a widow in her affliction, and do what I can to help her bear it."

The sincerity of Mrs. Freeman's speech was beyond dispute.

It seemed, indeed, that there was no end to Richard's experiences on this eventful night. He had met death, and crime, and desolation, and pity, each as unlooked for as the rest, all face to face for the first time; and in acknowledging that there was much genuine good about this woman, whom he had heretofore looked upon as meddling, prejudiced, and sycophantic, he derived an indefinable pleasure, which was also a comfort. And the poor boy needed comfort.

Rawdon, the butler, who was sitting up for him, was startled out of his sleepiness by the pale and care-worn face of his young master:

"Is anything amiss, Master Richard?"

"Yes; there has been a sad accident on the river. Poor George Parkes is drowned. Don't let my father know of it until the morning." Then he ran up-stairs to bed, but not to sleep. Reflections respecting his own position, his own interests, or what he thought to be so, now began to crowd upon his mind. If Parkes had committed the crime imputed to him, the obstacles to his marriage with Lucy would be great indeed—so great that if it had not been for those few lines in her handwriting which had just come into his possession he would have deemed them insurmountable. If all this had happened yesterday, for example, he would have taken it for granted, knowing Lucy's independence of spirit, that she would have released him from his engagement, nay, have cancelled it herself; would have resolutely refused to permit him to ally himself with shame and crime; but now, when, as poor George had said, she had "grown sick and tired of waiting for him"—that is, of longing for him—and had written, "I shall be at Swanborough to-morrow afternoon; pray be there to meet me," it was different. She might still hold him bound, and he would never deny her right to do so. He did not know, he could not guess—how could he?—that that sentence was not written for his eyes at all, but had been addressed by Lucy to her mother. She had reasons for wishing to see her, and, being forbidden to come to Durnton, had appointed Swanborough as their meeting-place; and her step-father had intercepted her letter, and would have used that extract from it for his own purposes. He knew that matters had come to a crisis with him, and that Richard's protection would be at once necessary to his liberty, and even to save his neck. If he could only precipitate matters between the young squire and Lucy, this might be done, and in no other way. If once he could have got Richard to go to Swanborough and meet the girl, he trusted to passion to do the rest. Explanations, misapprehensions, would have vanished, he knew, in her sweet presence. That he was thereby putting the girl's honor—the honor of his own wife's daughter—in extreme peril, did not enter into his calculations, or, if it did, was set down as so much to his own advantage.

And he was now lying dead and drowned under the Dorn rocks, and his soul had gone to its account to Him who gave it.

CHAPTER XXX.

LUCY GIVES UP HER LOVE.

GEORGE PARKES was a common type of mankind enough, and not so utterly worthless as circumstances made him to appear. He was, after all, as we have said, only a despot in the wrong place; but being there, it was he himself who suffered instead of the nation he ought, if nature had given him his rights, to have ruled. As it was, his subject, for he had but one, loyally bewailed his fate. Mrs. Freeman used to say that during that sad night's companionship with poor Annie, for she remained with her till dawn, she found it very difficult to listen to her eulogies upon her dead husband, for "she had really no patience with such rubbish;" yet somehow or other she found patience.

No doubt, too, she was softened toward the poor woman from hearing, as she did, from her own lips that the engagement between the young squire and Lucy was without her approval.

But really there was something to be said for George. He was a born poacher—as all sportsmen are; only some have lands of their own and some have not—yet he was always faithful as his employer's game-keeper.

It was not *his* game that he stole and sold, but only that of the neighbors. For years, as it came out, he had been in league with men who supplied to the London poulterers the produce of all the preserves in the vicinity, including those of his enemy, Mr. Pole; and in an evil hour he had made alliance with a still more predatory band, and "cracked" the Manor House at Masham. He had also, as I have said, cracked the skull of a footman who had had the imprudence to intervene between George and the tax-cart in which he had placed his plunder, but who got his wits back sufficiently to swear to his antagonist's identity.

All this came out at the inquest on George's body, at which, of course, Richard was the chief witness. The conventional homage, therefore, which the living pay to the dead, wherever it is possible, was denied to George Parkes: his widow alone mourned him, and even with her sorrow was doubtless mingled a sense of enfranchisement.

As to Lucy, she detested her step-father dead even more than she had done when he was alive. His last act had been her ruin. Wholly unconscious of the deception he had striven to practise upon Richard, she knew not how near the latter had been to throwing himself into her arms at Swanborough, or how now he watched and waited for some sign of that impatience to be his which he believed her to have already manifested. She thought that he must feel the ignominy of her step-father's conduct in the same light as she did herself—as a disgrace too terrible to be surmounted—and which had, as it were, overflowed and contaminated all connected with him.

When her mother came up to town (which she did at once on the invitation of Aunt Susan), she felt that all links between Durnton and Ford's Alley were practically severed, and that a few details only, by way of supplement, were left for her in order to make the separation complete.

She was misjudged, of course, by almost everybody. Very few—none indeed, perhaps save Richard himself—gave her credit for such gener-

ous feelings, and none, not even Richard, could estimate the agony it cost her to obey the dictates of her conscience. It was the opinion of all Richard's friends that, in spite of all that had "so providentially" happened to extricate the young man from his entanglement, he was not yet out of the net, and that Lucy would make some desperate effort to retain his allegiance. Even Aunt Susan was not sure what course her niece intended to pursue, while Mrs. Parkes was in total ignorance of her intentions. There had been little confidence between mother and daughter at any time, and of late years, thanks to the former's ill-judged second marriage, absolutely none; she only knew that her Lucy was too masterful to be dictated to by anybody, and would take her own way. The girl never spoke either to her mother or her aunt of her present feelings, but about a week after her step-father had been buried she told Susan that she wished to have a few words with Miss Talbot; and of course this opportunity was given to her.

These two women, more different in faith and feeling, in character and conduct, than even in their social position, had a certain respect for one another, though that, too, was, in each case, of a widely different kind. Edith, always grave, and attired in the gray uniform of her sisterhood, would have seemed to the casual observer more like a mourner than Lucy, who had positively declined to wear even the outward signs of regret for her late step-father; but one who looked beneath the surface would have seen in the latter's face a woe that was almost greater than she could bear. She did indeed bear it bravely, but, as in the case of other dumb creatures who are overlaid, the strain was felt for years.

"Would you mind coming into my own room, Miss Talbot?" said Lucy, when Sister Edith had been ushered into the upper parlor. "Perhaps aunt or mother might come in here, and—"

"By all means let us be alone," put in the other, eagerly. She felt this wish for privacy augured well for Richard, and, besides, was very willing to humor the poor girl in any case.

She had been in Lucy's bedroom, as we know, before, and she noticed that it had undergone a change. It had been always scrupulously neat and clean, but it now contained various articles of luxury which it had lacked before. The table was furnished with a swing looking-glass, and bore all the necessities for a rather elaborate toilet; a comfortable fauteuil had replaced the cane-bottomed chair that had stood in front of this table; and on the low walls were hung several pictures—landscape chromos in expensive frames. But for these circumstances the visitor would not perhaps have remarked Lucy's dress, for Sister Edith was not as other women in that respect, but she now took note that it was both of richer material and in far better taste than it had wont to be. These facts did not impress her favorably, though perhaps she would have been puzzled to say why it was so.

Lucy did not offer her visitor a chair, but stood before her, very stiff and straight, as she thus addressed her:

"Miss Talbot, you have gained your point, though you would not have done so had it not been for my step-father's misconduct. Heaven, as you may term it—hell, as it seems to me—has decided against me in this matter."

Edith would have spoken, but Lucy held up her hand for silence. "If you have any pity in your woman's heart, do not talk to me about it. I want neither thanks nor praise, as I deserve none, for what I am about to do."

She spoke mechanically, as though she had got her words by heart, and very slowly.

"I mean to give Richard up, rather than soil his name by coupling it with mine. I put my love underfoot—I wish I could kill it; but, alas! it lives, it lives—for his dear sake. Henceforward he is free." Her voice had suddenly grown very low. "Bear with me, madam. This is a sharp trial, and I feel it bitterly."

There was a short pause ere she went on again, with an attempt at steadiness very pitiful to listen to.

"If the time elapsed over during which I promised not to write to him, I would do so; but it is better as it is. You will write instead, and he will believe you. Tell him—tell him—"

The unutterable wretchedness of the poor girl's face and her trembling tones touched Sister Edith's heart, and she put forth her hand caressingly. But Lucy drew back: "No, no," she said, "do not soften me; I cannot bear it! I say, do you write to him and tell him, from me, that all between us two is over. You need not say that this has come to pass because I love him far too dearly to do him any harm: he will know that, I think; if not, it is better not to say it. And he must not write to me, nor come to me," she added, with sudden vehemence, "mind that, for then I could not answer for myself."

Sister Edith inclined her head. She could not trust herself to speak, lest she should sob outright.

"Well, there is nothing more but this," She took up a little packet that lay upon the bed and opened it.

"This is the locket, with his dear picture, that he gave to me. I cannot wear it any more, nor look upon it. Tell him so, but do not tell him why. And these—they are valueless to every eye but mine; yet take them—a pin-cushion, a thimble, and the like—he gave to me when we were boy and girl together."

"Keep *them*, dear Lucy," said Sister Edith, softly. "Why not? I will send the locket back, but keep the others."

"Do you think I might?" said Lucy, simply.

"Surely, surely. What harm can there be in keeping memorials of such a far-back time?"

She held them out, and the girl clutched at them as misers clutch at gold, and put them into her bosom. "Thanks, thanks!" she murmured.

Then, after a long pause: "You have been kind to me, Miss Talbot, all along, and meant me well, even when you seemed unkind. We part good friends, I trust?"

"Good friends and something more, dear Lucy, though you forbid me to say how highly I think of you. But why should we part?"

"Because it would pain me to meet you," said Lucy, quietly. "I must see no one who can remind me of—of Richard."

"For a time it may be so, Lucy. But, at all events, you must allow me to be of service to you. It will be no longer 'kindness,' as you term it, on my part; you have now a claim upon me that I can never ignore or forget."

"I am obliged to you," said Lucy, coldly;

"but henceforward I can receive nothing from your hand—no, not though it were to save me from starvation. I never sought advantage from your nephew's love, and I will accept nothing as compensation for the loss of it."

"That is ungenerous, Lucy, and unlike yourself. You and yours will now need help—"

"That is my affair," interrupted the girl, haughtily. "I can help myself and my mother too."

"May I ask how, Lucy?" and Sister Edith's eyes wandered, not without apprehension, to the swing-glass and the pictures.

"I am going on the stage."

"I trust not, I hope not," said Edith, hurriedly. "You do not know—setting aside the higher question, Is it right?—the hardships, and what is worse, the temptations, of such a calling."

"I think I do," said Lucy, a smile of something like contempt pouting her pretty lips. "At all events," the smile seemed to say, "I know a deal more about them than *you* do." Then her face softened as she added, "You see, Miss Edith, it is impossible that I can allow my aunt to bear this double burden of myself and my mother; and, though singing in the choir at St. Ethelburga is very well, it is not well paid."

"But it shall be so; I will speak to the rector," said Edith, eagerly.

"That means you will increase my salary yourself," answered Lucy, smiling. "No, Miss Edith, I again repeat that I am conscious of your goodness toward me. For all you have done for me I thank you kindly, and for all you would have done; but your help is no longer possible." And she held out her hand, not without a certain dignity.

Sister Edith took it, clasped it tenderly, and left her with a sigh instead of farewell. Their roads in life were henceforward fated to diverge more and more from one another; but their hearts retained always something in common, besides the love of a common object.

In the room below, the crippled little ones were still sitting at feast, as Sister Edith had left them, with Susan and the widow waiting upon them. Mrs. Parkes, though by nature weak, was too gentle and unselfish not to feel some comfort in such kindly ministrations. Edith beckoned Susan into an adjoining room.

"How is it, Miss Edith—has she not given him up?" asked the good woman, reading sorrow in her companion's eyes.

"She has done all that you expected of her, and more, Susan; she has behaved admirably, nobly, as respects Richard. It is only to herself that she is unkind."

"To herself?"

"Yes. She will no longer accept help of me, neither for herself nor for her mother."

"I am sorry she is so proud."

"It is not that—to do her justice; help from me appears to her in the light of a compensation for having given Richard up. Nor will she permit *you* to maintain her and Annie. She has announced her fixed intention to go upon the stage."

"Never!" cried Susan, vehemently—"never! The stage is no place for such as she. I will work my fingers to the bone first."

"She has too much independence of spirit, I fear, for you to overcome her resolve."

"Independence, Miss Edith! Who have I to work for, save for her? She is all the same as though she was kith and kin to me."

"Still, I do not blame her, Susan, for resolving not to be a burden to you. If you were in a better position as to the world's goods, then, perhaps, she would have no such scruples—"

"You do think that?" put in Susan, eagerly.

"Why, yes; in that case I cannot imagine her having any objection to receiving assistance from your hands; and if I could only manage to put money in your pocket without her knowing it—"

"It is better to be straightforward; and besides, the girl is as sharp as a needle," put in Susan, naively.

"But to let her go upon the stage," said Edith, "being so young and beautiful, and, as you have hinted, so open to admiration, would be—"

"Ruin!" interrupted Susan, with a groan.

"It is not to be thought of. I believe, however, that I have a plan to save her."

"What is it?"

"I shall know to-night; I will tell you to-morrow. I think, if I set about it at once, my scheme will answer."

"May God bless it and you!" cried Edith, fervently.

As if in answer to her prayer, there arose a harmony of little angels—the children were singing their grace.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SUBSTITUTE.

THERE are some persons in the world, though very few, it must be allowed, who are living protests against the doctrine of the divines concerning original sin. They are generally of the female gender, and Susan Parkes was one of them. Diminutive almost to dwarfishness, and disfigured, as we have said, by tufts and knots of hair on her bewrinkled face, she might have been excused, if any could be, for looking on life with jaundiced eyes. For her was neither lover nor husband possible; and from the world at large she had received, at best, but pity; at worst—and this was far more common—contemptuous ridicule. To many persons in her position the youth and beauty of others of her own sex would have aroused no tender thoughts. As it was, those gifts, though denied to herself, begat no envy in her, but only a desire to keep them spotless for those who possessed them. She was, it is true, as respected those little ones in ministering to whom she passed her days, but the almoner of another; but her duties toward them were performed with such heart-felt goodwill that they were sublimed, and became virtues. The principles on which Sister Edith acted were almost unknown to Susan, and certainly not understood. She had no learning, save what her Bible taught her, and even that suggested little of dogma. Her piety was of the most crude and simple sort; it had no colors, but then—to use a vulgar but very expressive phrase—it "washed."

In the graces of life poor Susan had never participated: friendship, in its ordinary sense, was as unknown to her as love itself. Even in the ties of blood she had been unfortunate, for George Parkes had been her only brother, and

the honesty of her heart was such that she could not idealize him as some natures might have contrived to do, or represented him to herself in any other light than that in which he really stood. She was quite aware, in short, that he was a ruffian. This knowledge had been fatal to any intimacy between them, and George had studiously kept Lucy away from Ford's Alley, lest she should have her eyes opened to his true character—a superfluous precaution, as it happened; first, because she had keen sight of her own; and, secondly, because Susan would have been the last to speak to Lucy of her mother's husband. However, so it had been, and the present had been the first time which the girl had ever passed beneath Aunt Susan's roof.

She had been there, however, now, for months, and the good creature's heart had warmed toward Lucy as though she had been her sister's child; I do not say as if she had been her own, for in that case she might have been blind to her faults, which she was not. She knew them well, and knew, too, the perils to which they would be only too likely to expose her. For Susan was well acquainted with the temptations of life, though she had never been herself exposed to them; and a child of light herself—though her angelic plumage was of a very common sort, with no gilt edges to the tips of the feathers—she had the wisdom of a child of this world. Her eyes had been by no means closed to Lucy's "goings on" while she had been under her roof. She felt, while there was at present no harm in the girl, that she had some dangerous characteristics—vanity, ambition, and, what might be worse than all, an overweening confidence in her own resources.

"I can take care of myself, aunt," had been Lucy's curt rejoinder on one or two occasions, when certain visitors had called to see Lucy, of whom Susan did not approve. They were persons in the music-hall and small theatrical line of business, who, having heard her singing and seen her beauty, had obtained introductions to her—we can scarcely say "*Heaven knows how*"—and had attempted to secure her as an attraction for their establishments. Their offers had seemed glittering, by contrast to the stipend which Lucy derived from her present engagement at St. Ethelburga's, but hitherto she had resisted them. Her good sense had told her that to be even the first singing-chambermaid at the "Thespis," or to be advertised as the "Great Vocal" at the Elysian Shades, would not have helped her on the road to be the wife of Richard Talbot, though she (erroneously) believed that a similar position in a higher scenic sphere would have done so.

But now that Richard was given up, she felt no longer so fastidious; she was as fixed as ever upon getting to the top of the theatrical tree, but she no longer shrank from setting foot on these low rungs of the ladder. Susan knew nothing of the reasons of Lucy's change of purpose; indeed, she thought it arose simply from her desire for independence, and unwillingness to be a burden upon her own scanty resources; but she was now in possession of the fact that the girl meant to go upon the stage, and the knowledge filled her with distress and horror.

She had never, herself, been within the walls of a playhouse; but had she been a Puritan,

which she was not, she could not have entertained a greater aversion for such establishments. She knew what had come of frequenting the Elysian Shades, in certain cases within her own experience; and that no similar catastrophe should happen to Lucy, God willing (as how should he not be?), this good little creature had made up her mind. She had told Sister Edith that she intended that very day to put a certain plan of hers into effect that had this end in view; but she was, in fact, somewhat doubtful as to how to proceed in the matter, or rather in what direction to take the first step. A circumstance, however, occurred that very afternoon which decided her. On entering the up-stairs sitting-room, a few minutes after Miss Talbot's departure, she discovered Lucy in the act of writing a letter, which the girl at once folded up and put in her pocket. Susan made no remark upon the action, but her quick eyes fell upon an envelope already addressed, and which the girl had omitted to remove from the table. This told her all she needed for her purpose.

In the evening, after tea, Susan went out. It was not unusual for her to do so, for she had often to go upon little errands of charity upon Miss Talbot's account to the poor people in the neighborhood. Her absence therefore excited no surprise in her niece and sister-in-law. The fact of it being a wet night would, under ordinary circumstances, have made no sort of difference, for Susan was accustomed to go out in all weathers; but in the present instance this circumstance did somewhat affect her; for she carried with her a precious something under her shawl, which caused her no little solicitude lest it should suffer damage. In the little sitting-room, there remained her flute-case as usual, except that the lid was locked; otherwise, whoever had opened it would have discovered that the casket had lost its jewel. For the first time in her life, Susan Parkes had gone out into the town, taking her flute with her.

Through the shine and slime of the wet gaslit streets she hurriedly made her way till she reached a broad thoroughfare, in the centre of which, darting rays of light through the murky air, like a midnight sun, stood that temple devoted professedly to Terpsichore, but also, clandestinely (for there was law against it), vowed to Thespis, called the Elysian Shades. Why Shades? one might well have asked on looking at its effulgent splendors; but of such interrogatives there is no end. Some persons might have even entered, and seen all, and then inquired in all honesty, Why Elysian? It was not until Susan came under the searching light of the gas star that hung upon the broad front of this edifice, like jewels on the brow of a stage-queen, that her eccentric appearance began to attract attention. It did not, however, escape the notice of the groups of idlers, who, as usual, were congregated about the entrance, the portico of which also afforded them a welcome shelter from the rain.

"Halloo!" said one, "here is a witch!"

"Ay, and a white witch!" added another, in reference to the tufts of gray hair which grew upon the little woman's face, like lichen upon an old wall.

Susan, though somewhat disconcerted by these remarks, pushed her way through the mocking crowd to the box of the check-seller. "I wish to see Mr. Drummond upon business," said she.

"You must let her through at once, Dick," observed one of the lively throng: "it is the queen of the fairies, who is desirous of an engagement. I say, Sall, she wants your place." Sall, a young lady in blue satin, with an ostrich feather, broken in the back, in her scanty bonnet, laughed shrilly at this stroke of humor. She *had* been a fairy, though not the queen of them, until within the last few nights, but had forfeited her position through an indiscreet indulgence in brandy-and-water before convivial hours—in other words, having become intoxicated before the ballet of fairies had been "called on," she had been dismissed by the stage-manager.

"You can't see Mr. Drummond to-night," said the check-seller, scornfully—"not if you was the Hempress of Morocco."

"But I *must* see him!" urged Susan, desperately (that shrill laugh had acted like a spur upon her); "I know Mr. Drummond, and he knows me. Please to send in this to him"—and she handed into the pigeon-hole a slip of paper, on which was written her address.

"We don't do anything for nothing at this establishment," observed the official, coldly.

Susan felt in her pockets, and, to her intense chagrin, found that she had left her purse at home. "I have no money, sir, but I pray you for Heaven's sake send in my message!"

"Oh lor! she's no fairy, but a tragedy-queen," ejaculated the first idler.

"Be quiet, Tom, and let the old woman be," cried the shrill-voiced young lady. "Dick, do you send in the message; I wish it."

"Obey the voice of beauty," said Tom, "or I'll never stand you a glass of gin again."

Thus adjured, Dick said to Susan, "Pass on, missus;" and at the same time admonished an attendant in scarlet to take the lady to the manager's room. Their way lay through part of the music-hall itself, filled with a numerous audience, and bright with gold and color. On the stage a young woman, in a garment which should have been high where it was low, and *vice versa*, was singing a ballad, the words of which did not reach Susan's ear, whereby, to judge from the plaudits that followed every verse, she must have lost a great artistic treat; it was not from disappointment, however, that Susan groaned and clasped her hands like one in pain: her wrinkled face had shuddering fear in it, and in her bright eyes might have been read a sort of frenzied terror. Fortunately, the attention of the company was too much engrossed for them to notice her, and presently her guide lifted a curtain which opened on a passage, at the end of which was a door with a ground-glass pane, on which was inscribed, "Manager's Room."

Susan had recovered the slip of paper whereon her address was written, and which, perhaps, would have availed her but little. Mr. Drummond might have been led to admit her to his presence, from the fact of her being under the same roof as Lucy, but that might also have affected him the other way. His views had already met with opposition from her; indeed, she had spoken very plainly to him on the only occasion that he had paid a visit to Ford's Alley. She had told him that no effort of hers should be wanting to persuade Lucy to reject his proposition that she should sing at "The Shades," and had even expressed a very decided, and an-

tagonistic, opinion upon the character of that establishment.

Upon the whole, it was well for her scheme, perhaps, that the Peri in blue satin had taken her part, and got the gate of this earthly paradise open for her. Her guide took no more upon him than to point to the manager's door, and then left her to introduce herself—which were his orders in such cases, Mr. Drummond's visitors upon business being sometimes unwilling to have their names divulged to more persons than necessary.

Susan knocked boldly, and, in answer to a gruff "Come in!" from the tenant of the apartment, entered it. It was a snug room enough, but very far from being a neat one. On a large velvet sofa were heaped various kinds of fanciful costumes; on the table were strewed bright little swords, and wreaths, and flags, and fans; on the floor were various other articles of ornamental appearance, but, as even Susan could understand, of slight intrinsic worth. The owner of these "properties" was himself attired in a costume that belonged, at least in part, to the stage. He wore tight-fitting black pantaloons, terminating in silk stockings and buckled shoes; while a gorgeous flowered dressing-gown concealed the rest of his ample proportions. An active figure was Mr. Drummond's still, notwithstanding his tendency to "adipose deposit," or, as the vulgar call it, "fat," and considering that he was also at least fifty years of age. His face was lined rather than wrinkled; he had a close-cropped head, and that blue-black look of the cheeks peculiar to actors off the stage; but he would have been well-looking enough, had it not been for the somewhat cynical expression and want of vivacity in his keen gray eyes.

"Well, madam—your business? I need not ask who you are," said he, coarsely. This allusion to the poor woman's personal appearance, which once seen was not indeed likely to be forgotten, would have been unpardonable in a baboon; but, then, no baboon had had Mr. Drummond's experience. He honestly believed that Susan's objections to her niece's joining his "company" were mercenary, and that she had now come to him to drive a bargain.

"My business is concerning my niece, Lucy Lindon. You have had a letter from her, I believe?"

"Of course I have. Why not say you know it at once, and the contents of it?"

"I do not know the contents of it; but I guess that she has agreed to sing on your stage for money."

"She does not propose to do so for love, begad, if you mean that. I am sure I am telling you no secret when I say she wants three pounds a week. Did you ever hear of such extortion? Three pounds a week for a novice, whose voice has never been tried except in a church choir! Perhaps, however," he added, with a sneer, "you are come here to propose some abatement in the terms."

"I think the terms are high," said Susan, gravely. "You would never give that money for her voice, Mr. Drummond? You believe that her beauty will attract your audience. It is a cruel gift for a poor girl to possess."

"Ah, you are doubtless thankful that Providence has not conferred it upon yourself; on the

other hand, you have your advantages, let me tell you."

"You mean that I am ugly enough for a show," said Susan, simply. "That is just what I am come about."

"What! you are seeking an engagement? Johnny, Johnny, come here!" And Mr. Drummond threw himself into an arm-chair in an ecstasy, and laughed uproariously.

An inner door was pushed open, and a wonderful vision presented itself. A very tall, thin woman, with fine features and speaking eyes, came noiselessly into the room. She was attired, if you could call her so, in what looked like webs of gossamer—some tight-fitting, delicate substance, giving the idea of being transparent, if it was not actually so, and powdered with gold.

This was Joanna (Mrs. Drummond) in her celebrated (dumb) impersonation of Titania, Queen of the Fairies.

To say that Susan was shocked is very inadequately to describe her feelings; she was astounded.

"What is the matter, James?"

"Matter? Here is an addition to the company. I thought I would let you see her, for fear you should be jealous of our *tête-à-tête*."

"A fortune-teller, a witch, a malignant fairy," observed Johnny, regarding Susan with critical eyes. "She would be worth a pound a week if the season were beginning. As it is, however, we have no part for her. Have you ever played before, my good woman?"

"Only on this, ma'am," Susan dropped her shawl, and brought out her flute. "Are you judges of music?"

Mr. Drummond smiled like Mephistopheles. "Are we judges of music? Well, one of us is, perhaps. Oh lor! I wish we could put this upon the stage."

Susan put her flute to her lips, and executed a lively air.

The manager listened with his head aside, at first comically, then critically, and at last with manifest approval. He kept time to the music with his head, and after a while Titania began to move in graceful circles—the very melody personified.

"Thirty shillings a week and dresses provided," murmured she, breathlessly, as the tune came to an end.

"Don't let us go too fast," observed her husband, reprovingly. "Perhaps our friend is like the silent parrot, who said, 'I think the more.' She may not be able to play anything else."

"Try me," said the performer, with quiet scorn. If there ever was a woman without vanity, it was Susan Parkes; but, then, probably there never was. If Susan was not proud of her flute-playing, she had, at all events, a just confidence in her skill. Again she set her lips to the fine instrument, and this time they evoked a strain so grave, yet tender, it was as though a window in heaven had opened, and some serene face full of divine pity were looking down on the struggles of men.

During this harmony Titania yawned, for she cared for no music that was not addressed to her feet; but her husband listened with great attention. *His heart was not touched, or, if it was, he was unaware of it, for it was no longer tender; but he had an appreciative ear.*

"You are a one, Miss Parkes, and that's a fact," said he, with a clap of his large hands, when she had come to the end of her tune. "But you are more fit for St. Ethelburga's than for us, though I grant that your appearance would be 'fetching.' Why not change places with your niece? Let her come here—"

"Never!" interrupted Susan, emphatically. "Mrs. Drummond, I appeal to you, as a woman to a woman."

Titania, who had been admiring her own ankles, looked up superciliously. She thought it rather a liberty in this frightful little creature to claim to belong to the same sex as her fair self.

"Your husband is endeavoring to tempt a very vain and beautiful girl, who at present is as pure as a snow-drift, to join this establishment. I propose myself as a substitute on her terms."

"A dancer?" exclaimed Joanna, turning upon her lord and master with sudden vehemence.

"No, dear, of course not. Not that it would have affected you in the least even if she had been. You are unapproachable."

This was not the view generally taken of Titania's character, and coming from her husband, it was therefore all the more gratifying and satisfactory. He intended his remark, however, only to apply to her position as *premiere danseuse*. "The young lady in question is a singer."

"It seems, however, that she is very beautiful," observed Joanna.

"That is what her relative says," returned her husband. "With some people all their own geese are swans."

"I have Lucy's photograph in my pocket," said Susan, and she whipped it out and placed it in Mrs. Drummond's hand.

In this the good woman showed her wisdom, though she was, as it happened, acting on fallacious grounds. Her idea was that Mrs. Drummond's jealousy would be excited at the idea of her husband's laying siege to so beautiful a creature as Lucy, whereas the lady was altogether above, or below, such conventional feelings. Moreover, it must be added, in justice to the manager, that he cared no more for *prima donnas* and *danseuses*, in the way of gallantry, than a grocer's boy, after a six months' apprenticeship, cares for treacle. Where Susan's argument touched Joanna was in the matter of stage competition; she could bear no rival near her throne. She was bordering upon thirty years of age, and even owned to twenty-four; and this picture showed the face of a young girl of exquisite beauty. The attraction of her own gossamer attire and twinkling feet would not, it was true, be directly endangered by the engagement of this wonder; but what a blow it would be if any considerable part of the audience should come to hear this pretty young person sing, and then go away again before the ballet, depriving her of her own legitimate audience!

"I think, Mr. Drummond," said she, speaking with great distinctness, "that this good lady here, with her flute-playing and—general appearance—is likely to prove more attraction to the Shades than this young person, even if her voice should be equal to her personal charms."

The manager sighed, and murmured, "They are all alike!"

"That is true," said Joanna, wilfully, misunderstanding his allusion, which, I am afraid, had

reference to the jealousy of womankind. "One girl is like another; but here we have a wonder, in its way," and she looked at Susan with admiration. "We must give her an appropriate title on the bills, of course. You are not particular, I suppose, about going under your own name, madam?"

"No, indeed, ma'am. I would much rather go under some other," said poor Susan, who, now that her self-sacrifice was concluded, began to feel the full extent of it. She pictured to herself the horror of appearing on that glaring stage with a thousand eyes fixed upon her with contemptuous ridicule.

"Of course, she must have a good name," said the manager, crossly—"The Harmonious Dwarf from the Hartz Mountains," or something of that sort; but there will be plenty of time to think about that. We must give the Long-haired Negress a month's notice before we get a vacancy. It was always a nuisance, letting people come on the stage to pull her hair and convince themselves it was genuine, and there's not so much of it as there was, in consequence. And then, ma'am, you shall have the three pounds a week that Miss Lindon asks for."

"Thank you, sir," said Susan, humbly. She bowed and withdrew, making her way back through the music-hall with even more alarm than when she came, for the noisy throng had now a more personal significance for her. In a few weeks she herself, and her frightfulness, and her fate, would be the very cynosure of it for at least some dreadful minutes every night. She wondered at her own courage that had brought this terrible preferment upon her, even though it was for Lucy's sake; yet felt it better that she should be made a laughing-stock, and her skill be mocked at, by the ignorant crowd, than that her niece should be exposed to peril. There would be no excuse for Lucy's going upon the stage now, upon the score of necessity, since she had found a substitute.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN ATTEMPT AT MEDIATION.

PERHAPS the most significant proof of the disgrace that attached to the memory of George Parkes was that all Durnton folk began to pity his widow. She had, as we have seen, been the especial object of Mrs. Freeman's contempt and suspicion, and the contempt had been shared by most of her neighbors. They had never forgiven the pretty widow her insane folly in throwing herself away on such a ne'er-do-well as Parkes, and had hitherto thought she "deserved all she got;" "she had made her own bed, and must lie on it," etc., etc. But now they perceived that her punishment must have been severe beyond anything they had imagined. She had been mated, it now appeared, not only with a violent and lawless ruffian, but with a burglar, who had narrowly escaped being a murderer; and who, if he had not been drowned, would certainly have come to the gallows. That all was over with that attachment of the squire's son to the step-daughter of such a scoundrel was taken for granted, as Richard saw, by everybody.

"The poor boy can neither be so mad nor so

bad as to go on with it," said Mrs. Freeman, and she expressed the general sentiment; and when Annie left the village, it was felt that the last tie between him and the family at the spinney cottage was severed.

Richard, too, felt something of this himself, though his heart was still loyal to Lucy. In a month or two, when the term agreed upon for their mutual silence should be ended, he must write to her, of course; but he hardly knew what he should say. He secretly hoped that the girl would write first to him, which would release him, at all events, from a great embarrassment. His own conviction was that she would herself cancel their engagement, in which case he would not endeavor to renew it. The Fates would then have too obviously declared against him to admit of a further struggle. If he could have seen her—nay, if he had only possessed the photograph which had aroused Mrs. Drummond's jealousy—matters might have been different (George Parkes had well understood that); but, as it was, he wavered in his mind.

No one spoke to him about Lucy, nor even about George; if they had, he would, no doubt, have made what excuses for the man were possible; but this very absence of antagonistic feeling was proof that in their judgment there was no longer any one to contend against. The rector was blandly cheerful, and proposed various schemes of entertainment—rides to "remarkable places" in the neighborhood, and attendance at the great missionary meeting in the Town-hall at Swanborough, where a real African chief (converted) was to dance a new dance with the double club.

The squire's manner to his son had grown demonstratively tender. Hitherto he had ignored his affair with Lucy altogether, as a boyish absurdity; but, now that it must needs be all over—if the lad was but sane—Mr. Talbot exhibited a certain pity for the lad. It was while matters were in this condition, and still a few weeks remained before Richard was free to reopen communications with Lucy, that he received the following letter from Aunt Edith:

"MY DEAR DICK [she never called him by that name, save when she was exceptionally pleased with him, or when she was about to try his patience or good-feeling, and at the mere sight of the word his sinking heart suggested to him what was coming],—I have seen dear Lucy [there was another blow; she would never have called her "dear" if all chance of her becoming "near" to her had not been over], and she bids me write to you, instead of her. She is sure you will forgive her (as I am) for employing a substitute to say that all must needs now be over between her and you. Even as it is, she feels a bitter pang, for she loved you truly—so truly that nothing would have induced her to do you a mischief that she herself believed to be one. She and I, you know, have differed widely upon this point, dear Richard, but now there is no room for difference. Her honest pride, as well as her honest love, compel her to break off her engagement with you under present circumstances. You may say, 'She is innocent;' that is true: I will add that her character has something of true nobility in it; but to marry her would be to ally yourself with unspeakable disgrace. I send

her love to you—though she does not bid me do so—for the love of such a girl, I believe, can do you no harm, any more than a good man's blessing on his death-bed. She is dead to you henceforth, Richard: it must be so, and she sees it must. Forbear, then, I entreat you, to take any steps to move her from her just resolve. They would be useless, and they would inflict severe pain. I send by the next post, at her request, the locket which you gave her. I opened it—was it sacrilege, Richard?—and have been looking at the face within it. It is an honest face, and, I am sure, a kind one. I am prejudiced in its possessor's favor, because he is dear to me; but I think he respects honor and duty. These point the same way henceforth, dear boy, though heretofore it may have seemed to you that they were in opposition. Honor now demands your acquiescence in Lucy's resolve that you should henceforth be strangers; for would it not be base to give her pain? Duty, as before, compels you to obey your father. I make no personal appeal to you, dear Dick, for it would be out of place: let me count myself—though I hope I am something more—merely among your friends and well-wishers. I know you will not hesitate to accept the inevitable, neither passionately nor morosely, but in a gentle spirit. I have heard with sorrow that your father is not well; if I know you, you will not aggravate his physical pain by mental trouble. God bless you, and keep you and comfort you, is the prayer of your loving aunt,

"EDITH TALBOT."

Richard was not given to tears, but this letter drew them from his eyes, his pity for himself was so overwhelming.

He pitied Lucy too; but it must be confessed that her renunciation of him did not awaken the feelings which it ought to have done—or, at all events, to the due extent. His *amour propre* was wounded. He could not, after all, he thought, have been so dear to her as she had been to him, or no consideration would have persuaded her to give him up, for he would have stuck to her at all risks.

The letter, in fact, had exactly the effect it was designed to produce, though the means were not such as the writer had calculated upon. What she had said about his father, however, perhaps suggested to Richard his "throwing up the sponge"—since it must be so—with a good grace. When he had recovered himself a little from the first shock, he walked straight into the library and placed Edith's letter in his father's hand.

The squire received him with a smile, which faded away as his eye glanced at the envelope. "This is some communication from your aunt, I see; does it concern me in any way?" inquired he, indifferently.

"Yes, sir; both you and me," replied Richard.

The squire read the letter to the end without comment.

Then, "Well, my boy, you see the wisdom of this advice, I hope?" he said.

"Yes, sir; I have given Lucy up. It is all over," said Richard, looking the very picture of despair and woe.

"Poor boy—good boy!" said the squire, softly. "I am sorry you have given yourself such pain."

"And I am sorry, sir, to have given you pain. You shall have no more trouble with me henceforth."

Richard meant nothing but dutifulness, but his tone was so melancholy that one would have thought he meant to die, and so preclude all further parental solicitude.

"I grudge no trouble for you, dear boy," returned his father, laying his hand on the lad's shoulder, "nor time, nor money, nor anything I have to give. I live for you alone."

"Dear father!"

For the first time since that inexplicable cloud had come between the boy and the man, these two stood heart to heart.

"Is there anything—anything, Dick, that I can do for you, to show how dear you are to me?"

"No, father, for that requires no proof. And yet," added he, with a sudden impulse, "there is something—it is not for me exactly—but—"

"If it is for any one dear to you, for any one to whom you are indebted, or fancy yourself to be so, it shall be all the same as though it were yourself, Richard."

The squire's mind had at once reverted to Lucy. If the boy had asked for a thousand pounds for her, he would have freely given it.

"Yes, it is for some one dear to me, and to whom I am deeply indebted. Father, pray forgive Aunt Edith."

If the fabled Lamia had taken her serpent shape just as her ripe lips were being pressed to those of her lover, he could scarcely have exhibited a greater change of mien than did the squire as he heard these words; he did not, indeed, start back from his boy in absolute loathing, but he drew himself up stiff and stern, like a man of stone.

"To any request in reason, Richard, I shall be happy to listen," said he, coldly; "but you should not meddle with matters of which you have no knowledge."

"I know, sir, that Aunt Edith has been most kind to me," urged Richard, simply; "and I know that it is most distressing to her that you and she, being brother and sister—"

"Be silent, boy!" interrupted the squire, angrily. "I will not be schooled by you. If the woman of whom you speak had had her way, you would have been a beggar—do you hear?—a beggar."

Richard heard, of course, but he scarcely believed his ears.

"That seems so strange, sir—"

"It is true, boy, for all that," continued the other. "If you have not heard it from my lips before, it was because I flattered myself that you would have given your father credit for having good reasons for a course of conduct which might otherwise seem strange. It appears, however, that you have preferred to listen to one, the very atmosphere of whose being is falsehood and duplicity. Your aunt may call herself what she likes—'Sister,' forsooth, is the name she deems the fittest, because she has behaved so little like one—but she is Jesuit to the core. There, let us have no more of it; I am sorry you must needs have mentioned her at such a time. Her letter, it is true, is well enough—you need not say that I have seen it—but read your Bible, and you will find what sort are those who compass sea and land to gain one proselyte."

The force and fire with which Mr. Talbot spoke appeared to have exhausted him, for he here sunk down into his chair, and uttered a deep sigh.

"You are not well, father; can I do nothing for you?" said Richard, tenderly, alarmed at the change that had come over the squire's face.

"No. I shall be better presently—if I am left alone."

At this hint Richard withdrew at once, amazed and even shocked. In the passage he met the rector, who had just come to pay his usual morning visit to the Tower. He took him into a neighboring room, and told him all from first to last. "My father, it is clear, is not himself," he added, "and I fear he is far from well."

"He is as well as he will ever be, Richard," answered the other, gravely. "Let what you have seen to-day be a warning to you not to vex him."

"I did not mean to vex him, but quite otherwise. What can be the meaning of his detestation of poor Aunt Edith? I am sure you do not think, as he does, that she is false and deceitful."

The rector winced; for though he did not think so now, he had been very recently of that opinion.

"She has, at all events," he said, "unfortunately allied herself with very deceitful people."

"She is my father's own flesh and blood," urged Richard; "his own sister."

"If you read your Bible, Richard," was the rector's grave reply, "you will find that the contentions between brethren are as 'the bars of a castle.'"

But though thus twice referred to Holy Writ for an explanation of his social problem, it still remained to Richard an unsolved one. Not being a theologian, he could not understand this virulence of feeling between two persons of the same kith and kin; and even if he had been one, there would have remained a certain residuum of ill-feeling, not to be accounted for by the mere rivalry of creeds.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ON THE ROAD DOWNHILL.

THERE were many things that now conspired together to make the house of Richard Talbot anything but what home should be, and, indeed, well-nigh intolerable to him. His father's momentary burst of tenderness, checked, and, as it were, frozen, by the boy's generous attempt to bring Aunt Edith into favor with her kinsman, did not recur; he fell once more into his sombre and solitary ways. It was clear to Richard that his presence at the Tower was no comfort to the squire, and it was certainly no pleasure to himself. The house was gloomy and lifeless; the village was full of painful memories of her who had become dead to him, without any of the solace that springs from death, and which, like the flowers on the grave, keeps our thoughts of those who lie beneath it sweet and fragrant. He regretted her, but without resignation; if inexorable fate had separated them forever, he could have borne it better; but she had voluntarily abandoned him, and he had sullenly acquiesced in the estrangement. If he had not

been angry with her, he might even still have sought to renew their attachment; but, as it was, the thing was done, and every voice said it was well done, save the whisper of his own heart.

Even his old pleasures of the woods and fields were now become distasteful to him, for they were associated with one who had been the final cause of his misfortune. As to the river, he never went near it; even in its distant murmur he seemed to hear the miserable cries of a drowning man; its waters were as the waters of death.

The end of the Christmas vacation, which brought good-bye to home and father, Richard, therefore, hailed with joy.

He returned to college, however, another man—or it will be, perhaps, sufficient to say, a man. His boyish instincts, affections, amusements, had perished, and by violence; and he had suddenly arrived at man's estate, though in wisdom far from maturity. Up to this time his aimless, idle ways had done him little harm; the river and the cricket-field had acted as safety-valves to his restless temperament; but wholesome relaxations of this kind offered him no longer any attraction. He took to cards and billiards, and such dissipations as the university affords. He made his first book at the Spring Races at Newmarket, and became a fast man. To judge by what came of its dissolution, indeed, one would have said that Mr. Freeman had not been far wrong in Richard's case, with respect to the influence for good of "a virtuous attachment."

In losing his Lucy he seemed to have lost his sheet-anchor, and began to drift toward the dogs. Not, indeed, that he sunk so low as to become literally "doggy"—a patron of bull-pups, which is the lowest type of the fast undergraduate; but he became "horsey," which, when unaccompanied with a real devotion to field-sports, is almost as bad. He had the odds on the Derby and Oaks on the tip of his tongue; and talked of "Cambyse's year" as though it marked the epoch of an event of more importance than most things in the history of mankind. Who does not know the symptoms of the young gentleman recently inoculated with the hoof-and-mouth disease—the passion for the turf; whose rubric is the "meetings for the year," and whose Bible is the Racing Calendar? It is one of the most melancholy forms of moral delusion; and in youth the saddest of all, since the one earnest thing about it is the desire—it must be allowed, very seldom gratified—of acquiring gain at the expense of others. I sometimes think that the mighty mind of Swift, when he wrote his "History of the Houyhnhnms," must have been endowed with prescience, and have figured allegorically what has come to pass among us in respect to the turf. So much is the horse, in what some call "the best circles," set above the man.

Mr. Greene's ridicule of the equine superstition was a mitigating circumstance, but he could not prevent his young friend from making considerable sacrifices—for which the squire had to pay—to the four-footed god. As to his other extravagances, his mentor could exercise little or no restraint over them. At Richard's rooms were now found the most expensive wines, and young gentlemen who talked with gravity about "the vintages," cigars half a foot long, and with brands whose names corresponded with

their length; and pictures and statues, principally of the female sex, the cost of which, though great, was certainly not enhanced by the amount of their drapery. On seeing Talbot's "rooms" for the first time after this gorgeous transformation, Mr. Greene, in the character of Christopher Sly, cried, "For Heaven's sake, Dick, a sup of small-beer!" Dick answered, naively, that he had no small-beer, and produced a pint of the very driest champagne as a substitute.

"What a thing it is to have a father and a Tower!" observed the other, as he sipped it.

And indeed Mr. Talbot, senior, never uttered a remonstrance, whatever bills came in, though his son's liberal allowance was now all expended on necessities—such as debts of honor—and had quite lost its original uses. When Richard wrote to ask leave to spend the next vacation with his friend Greene, at his guardian's house near London, he not only received the desired permission, but a check for extraneous expenses; and I am sorry to say, though the young gentleman was grateful, he also felt that it was a relief to his father to hear that he would pass the holidays away from home. There was no actual bad-feeling between the two, nor could it be fairly said that "there were faults on both sides;" there were rather misfortunes.

During the vacation, Richard, for the first time, saw "life"—as the whirl of metropolitan dissipation has been ludicrously termed—and, on the whole, enjoyed it. For such a purpose Leonard Greene was the most agreeable of companions, and by no means a bad one—supposing it was necessary to see such life at all—in a moral sense. His appreciation of humor was so keen that vice, under its influence, lost much of her varnish in Richard's eyes; it is not advisable even to gallop through the mud, but there is ever so much of difference between that and wallowing in it. Greene was ignorant of most things really worth knowing, almost to sublimity, though, from his natural prudence (he never spoke, if he could help it, of what he did not understand) and his acute instinct, he seemed to know more than he did. He was also what serious persons would, and do, call flippant; and yet he was so genuine, as well as genial, that he made friends in the most unexpected quarters. Richard took him to Gresham Street, and introduced him to Lady Earnshaw and Aunt Edith, and the former was quite delighted with him.

"I always like nice boys," she said, "and should have fallen in love with Dick, only you see"—here she sighed—"he was my grandson."

Aunt Edith looked very grave at this, as a sort of side-blow at the Rubric. If she should ever come to like Richard's friend, it would be, she thought, only for Richard's sake, for he seemed as gay and thoughtless as a butterfly. She knew, however, that he had behaved well and wisely in the matter of Lucy.

Lady Earnshaw asked the two young men to dinner, and took the opportunity of inviting Mr. Vane also, not because she liked him any better than of old, but because it was necessary to ask him sometimes out of compliment to Edith, and anything was better than having the man alone. Richard took care to warn his humorous friend of the question that was sure to be put to *Duncombe* when dinner was announced—"Does *not his lordship* dine at home?" with its stereo-

typed reply of "No, my lady." But it would have been better for Mr. Greene had he omitted the precaution, for the idea so tickled that young gentleman beforehand that he nearly choked in the cab on the way to Gresham Street, and, when the interrogatory was put, was seized with such a fit of coughing that her ladyship was quite alarmed for his life. He afterward likened the scene to the children's game of "Is the Emperor of Morocco dead?" which has to be carried on without a smile.

Mr. Vane's fashion of addressing Miss Talbot as Sister Edith, and the manifest contempt it evoked from his hostess, was also a great trial to Mr. Greene's gravity. But, on the whole, he acquitted himself very creditably, and by his marvellous tact succeeded, before the meal was over, in removing the prejudice of his neighbor, Miss Talbot, against him. She even said to him, when the others happened to be engaged in talk, "We are all greatly indebted to you, Mr. Greene, for the course you took with respect to poor Richard's engagement." He answered that he had but done what was obviously right, and only regretted that his services had been so valueless. The young woman herself had, it seemed, got Dick out of the scrape.

"That is true," said Edith; but the confession was made with such evident reluctance, that he could not help inquiring whether it was not true that she had behaved well in the matter.

"Yes," said Edith, "I have nothing to say against her on that score."

"Do you know what has become of the young lady?" asked Mr. Greene, his curiosity still piqued by the tone of her reply.

"Yes—at least, no," she answered, hurriedly.

"It is a sad story."

"I am sorry indeed," said Greene, and his voice betrayed that he spoke truth.

They were silent for a while, during which a dispute was carried on between Mr. Vane and Richard concerning public schools, which were not in favor with the former, that seemed to afford Lady Earnshaw much amusement.

Presently said Edith, speaking in a low tone: "I should be very sorry if I have given you a worse impression of Lucy London, Mr. Greene, than I intended to convey. I know nothing against her character; but she has taken a step that has much displeased me, and distressed a tried and true friend of hers, her aunt. She has gone on the stage."

"On the stage!" echoed Greene, with vivacity; "dear me! Which is her theatre?"

"I know nothing about that," answered Edith, severely; "nor do I want to know. The fact is, the poor woman, her aunt, was prepared to make—and indeed did make—the greatest possible sacrifice for her, in order to prevent her taking so every way prejudicial a step. She would have been a guardian angel to the girl if only she would have permitted her. But she has taken her own way, and nothing but ill can come of it."

"Dear, dear!" said Mr. Greene, with sympathy. But the fact was, his curiosity was greatly excited, and he determined to read the theatrical announcements in the newspapers next morning with especial care.

"You will not say a word of what I have been telling you to Richard?" were Edith's last words as she rose from the table.

"Not a syllable, Miss Talbot. We never speak upon that subject; but your wish, in any case, would seal my lips."

In spite of his light ways, Edith felt somehow that Mr. Greene had a good heart, and was a gentleman.

Lady Earnshaw went much farther; she expressed her opinion, when Edith and she had retired to the drawing-room, that the young man was "delightful." She pointed out how hard it must have been for him, with his liveliness and love of fun, to have left Masham Manor to stay at the Tower "with Francis and his doldrums"—so she termed her son-in-law's spiritual gloom—in order to keep company with Richard during his love-fever. "A pretty time he must have had of it, with the society of that canting Mr. Freeman and the murderous game-keeper for his only distractions."

Below-stairs, the object of these eulogiums found it rather more difficult to make himself agreeable. For Richard, who well remembered "Father Vane's" behavior to him of old—when he had been so good as to see him safely to the railway-station—was inclined to be antagonistic in his manner toward the priest, which, considering Richard was *pro tēm*, his host, Mr. Greene resented as "bad form." Indeed, he went so far on the road of conciliation as to ask Mr. Vane to join a little dinner-party at his club on the ensuing day, which was foolish of him, since the proposed guest would hardly have mixed well with the rest of the company. Embarrassment on this score was, however, cut short by a *Deus interit*—a theological circumstance.

"I am obliged to you," said Mr. Vane, gravely, "but to-morrow is a Friday."

"You have an engagement? I am sorry," said Mr. Greene, without the faintest consciousness of a religious scruple.

"And I am sorry, too, my young friend; not only that I am obliged to decline your hospitality, but because you should have fixed upon a Friday for such an entertainment."

"I don't believe in luck myself" said Mr. Greene, indifferently. Whereupon Mr. Richard Talbot began to laugh.

It is a well-known fact that people of wholly opposite views "get on" together socially much better than those who merely differ from one another in details; but then it is important that folks should know what the views of others are. You may make a Parsee very angry by speaking disrespectfully of the sun in London; and the Rev. Gerald Vane's opinions were as absolutely unknown—and, indeed, unintelligible—to Mr. Leonard Greene as those of a Parsee. Mr. Greene's people had for generations been "connected with commerce," and had not much concerned themselves with anything else; while what religious principles had been inculcated in him had not been derived from the Church of England. At Eton, indeed, he had noticed that some account was made of Fridays and saints' days, but as holy days he had always spelt them with an *i*, and had considered their very observance a local, though highly laudable, custom. He had never conceived to himself an individual who had religious objections to dine out upon a Friday; and for once his friend Richard was in a position of superior knowledge. He felt that explanation was impossible within the time that

could be given to it, for Duncombe had already come in with the coffee, but he did contrive to stammer out an apology.

"It is not to me, Mr. Greene, that you should express contrition," was Mr. Vane's cold reply, as he rose from table, whereat Richard laughed again, in a manner which afterward drew forth from his young friend the remark that he did not know—concerning Mr. Richard Talbot and Mr. Gerald Vane—which had shown himself the bigger fool of the two.

This circumstance naturally strengthened Mr. Vane's prejudice against Richard, whose friends, it seemed, were actually unacquainted with the first principles of the Christian religion; and he more than ever grieved that the estate of Talbot Tower, instead of reverting to so unworthy a recipient, had not passed—as he understood that at one time there had been hopes of its passing—into the pure hands of one who loved the Church. Lady Earnshaw, had she been conscious of this aspiration, would have said, "You mean the Church's ministers;" but therein she would have wronged the priest. Narrow and harsh as his "views" made him, he was no self-seeker; on the contrary, he lived a life of self-sacrifice, and did more good work every twelve hours than some persons of more elastic faith are wont to compass in a twelvemonth.

The little dinner in Gresham Street could not, however, be considered a success. Even Mr. Greene acknowledged that he had "put his foot in it," and always afterward spoke of Mr. Vane as his "ghostly enemy." Richard, on his side, in addition to his dislike of the curate, was very far from being at ease. He could not speak to his aunt Edith of the matter which still lay next his heart, and in which she had taken such a prominent part. Her gentle voice was more sweet and low than ever when she addressed him that evening, and the clasp of her hand had a more tender significance for him than of old. His meeting with her turned his thoughts back, for the time, into the old channel, and made him sad.

"Did Aunt Edith speak to you," he inquired of his friend, as they drove home, "of—of—Lucy?"

"Well, yes," returned that astute young gentleman; "she said something very civil—though quite unnecessary, about my having gone to the Tower when you were in trouble."

"She didn't say whether she was still living at the old place?"

"Not a syllable."

Then, after a long silence, Richard asked whether his friend would mind calling in Ford's Alley—"Not that I want to see her again, you know, but just to hear how she is."

Greene shrugged his shoulders to express disapproval of this course, but answered, "I will go, of course."

And the next day he went accordingly. On his return he found Richard looking rather pale and anxious.

"Well, Greene, tell me, whom" (he said "who") "did you see?"

"I saw the most wonderful person; an old lady charmingly wrinkled, with a beard in the wrong place—over her eyes—for one thing."

"That is her aunt Susan."

"Indeed; well, she didn't treat me like one

of the family by any means. She thought me no better than I should be, evidently; and, indeed, since I was not to mention your name, I did feel I had very little right to ask questions."

"But you did ask after—after—Lucy?"

"I asked after Miss Lindon, and I was told she no longer lived there. I then inquired where she did live, and was informed—that it was no business of mine. I was told, indeed, she was well, but in the same tone in which we used to reply to kind inquiries at Eton; the lady's manner had a none-the-better-for-seeing-you sort of air with it."

"Then you have found out nothing?"

"Nothing, my dear Dick, except that the conclusion at which you have so wisely arrived is completely coincided in and approved of by the young lady's relatives."

"You are telling me the truth?" said Richard, suspiciously. "You are not deceiving me? You really do not know where Lucy is?"

"Upon my honor, I do not," Mr. Greene spoke truth, though not the whole truth; not only had Susan Parkes declined to give him the slightest information as to the girl's present residence, but—which he omitted to add—he had looked over the theatrical announcements in the newspapers, and even the advertisements in the *Era*, in vain: the dramatic firmament showed no star that either beamed or twinkled under the name of Lucy Lindon.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

NOT YET.

FROM the day of his friend's visit to Ford's Alley, we may date Richard's complete emancipation from what was called by his friends "his unfortunate entanglement." He never spoke, and very seldom even thought, of Lucy again. But it must be confessed that his freedom—like that of most persons who have once been slaves—partook somewhat of the character of license. His tastes for extravagance increased, and very little of his money was spent in the advancement of missionary enterprise, or to any other good purpose. His nature was too genuine to admit of his sinking into the slough of swelldom; he never pretended to be indifferent to all matters human and divine—though, it must be confessed, he concerned himself with the former rather to the exclusion of the latter. He was not vicious in cold blood. He did not disbelieve in the existence of good men and women because his own mode of life did not bring him into contact with them. But he walked "in the way of his own heart and the sight of his own eyes," and they were evil. The years were not many since he had rowed Lucy across the Dorn to see the Pharos's light lit, but the difference between what he had been and what he had become—between man and boy—was measureless. His love for the girl now appeared a mere episode in his life, and so far back (or so it seemed) as to have belonged almost to another state of existence. If *our bones and flesh, and thews and sinews, change, as we are told is the case, every seven years, our thoughts, and feelings, and instincts often do the like, and even within a shorter*

space. And they had not changed in Richard Talbot's case for the better.

Durnton had ceased to pain him from its associations, and even the gloom of the Tower was not so oppressive as heretofore; his nature had become less sympathetic. He was sorry the poor governor moped so, and entertained some apprehension that he showed symptoms of breaking up; but his father's sombre and melancholy ways, and even his behavior toward himself, which was cold and reticent as ever, though as usual relieved by touches of tenderness, no longer distressed him. He only felt exceedingly bored at Durnton, and preferred to spend his vacations anywhere save at home.

Thus matters went on till Richard's university course was almost over—the fruits of which it could scarcely be said were satisfactory. His friendship with Leonard Greene still continued, and was an influence for good; but they were less and less together even now; and it might well have been predicted that when their college days were over, the roads of these two young men in life would have diverged, and that they would have bidden light farewell to one another.

Greene was tending more and more toward theatrical pursuits. He had at last contrived to get a little comedy of his own, "The Suitors," played by the Dramatic Club, and it had been a great success—at the university. As the author of "The Suitors," he felt an inch or two higher, and flattered himself if he could only gain for it the attention of the London public that he should add several inches to his stature. Richard wished him every success, but on his second attendance at the representation of his friend's piece he yawned. It was a slight matter—a mere sound—but the author saw it, and was affronted. A coolness had sprung up between the two friends, which was dissipated, however, as such things will be, by a real trouble befalling one of them.

Richard was playing pool one night, as usual, in the public room he frequented, and a point or two above his ordinary game. He had won one pool, and was on the point of dividing another, when some one, in spite of the solemn warning painted on its glass panel, "Wait for the stroke," threw open the door in haste, and caused him to miss his ball. "By jingo!" exclaimed Richard, angrily—as a matter of fact, he used the very same word that Robert Parkes had done when he kicked his oar and life away together—and then his eye met Leonard Greene's. The room was in an uproar at once; the backers of the late "striker" indignant at the inopportune intrusion, and those who had bet against him admitting it was "deuced hard" as they pocketed their gains; but the chief sufferer put on his coat and followed his friend out of the place without a word.

"What is it, Leonard?" He used the Christian name because of their late little estrangement.

"I have bad news for you, Dick; your father is very ill."

"Not dead?" pleaded Richard, turning very pale. His heart in a moment was sluiced with a torrent of remorseful thoughts of him who had never said him nay to any wish, save one, and who would have been called by many sons the best of fathers. He felt, for the first time, how he had taken all his father's generosity as a mat-

ter of course, and how little, how very little, of his time or thoughts he had given to him in return for it.

"No, Dick, not dead, but very ill. He has had some sort of a stroke, as I gather."

"My God!" cried Richard, looking at his cue (which he had forgotten to put away) with agonized self-reproach, "to think that I should have been playing this wretched game!" He meant to imply, "While my poor father was on his death-bed!"

"Don't fret, Dick; how should you have known?"

"How did *you* know?" inquired Richard, almost fiercely, "when I, his son—"

"That's easily explained," put in the other. "Mr. Freeman telegraphed to me as well as to you, in case you should not happen to be in your rooms, and feeling, of course, that I should know where to find you." And he put into his hand that envelope of yellow with which we have all now become so well acquainted, and the color of which would almost seem to have been borrowed from the Chinese, who use it as a sign of mourning, so doleful is the news it often conveys.

The telegram was from the rector: "Mr. Talbot has been taken suddenly and dangerously ill. Richard, to whom I have also telegraphed, must come at once. Carriage will be at station to meet every train."

The words, as Greene perceived, seemed to stupefy Talbot, rather than to spur him to exertion.

"Now, pull yourself together, Dick," said he, decisively. "You have exactly twenty-five minutes in which to catch the mail. Your gyp is packing your portmanteau, and a trap is waiting at the college gates."

"Oh, Greene, how kind and thoughtful you are! And I, God help me, never think of anything!" Then, with a sudden impulse, "Don't fancy I didn't like your play, old fellow, because I yawned."

"Tut, tut! The play be d—d, as it most likely will be. Look here, if I can be of any service at the Tower, send for me, by wire, and I will be with you in three hours: give me a line, at all events, to say how matters are. Here's the trap and your portmanteau."

"Good-bye, Leonard."

"Not yet; I shall see you to the station." And off they rattled in the jingling fly together.

Richard was silent, full of sombre thoughts, but presently he felt the other's hand upon his knee.

"Dick, old fellow, you will forgive me for offering a piece of advice on such a subject, but if your poor governor should ask you to promise anything, at such a time, you must do it, mind."

"Of course I will, Pussy." It was curious, but not without a touch of a pathos, that he should have thus recurred to the old school name of his companion. There was nothing in it, as both felt, of offense now, and somehow it seemed to suggest the long years of friendship between them better than any other.

"I don't know that he has anything to say to you in particular, but I used sometimes to think, Dick, when I was at Durton, that your father had some trouble on his mind. It is your bounden duty, if it be so, Dick, to lighten it all you can."

"Indeed, I will," said Richard, earnestly. They parted on the platform, with a "Thanks, thanks, old fellow!" upon one side, and a "God bless you, Dick!" upon the other; and each well-worn phrase for once was genuine and full of meaning.

Richard Talbot would have had enough to think about, and of a very serious sort, as he was whirled through the summer night alone in the railway carriage, even had his friend not hinted of something which his father might have to communicate to him in what would in all probability be his last hours. There had been a time when Richard had also suspected something of the sort, but then the mystery had been revealed to him, as he believed, in the story which linked him with Charles de Blaise. His father's gloom, seclusion, and even his partial estrangement from himself, the young man had set down as the effects of religious melancholy—for which, it must be confessed, he entertained feelings more akin to contempt than pity. Upon the whole, after much reflection, he came to the conclusion that these symptoms, none of which, of course, had escaped Greene's acute observation, had misled his friend, as they well might. If anything should be demanded of him, he was, on the other hand, prepared to do it: he felt, indeed, that all he could now do in deference to his father's wishes must fall far short of what he owed him, and would still leave years of omission to be repented of, but, alas! not to be redeemed.

Richard had arrived again at one of those epochs when the realities of life demand an attention which men of his type never pay to them, save under pressure of their impotency. There are times when even the idler and the trifler are made to stand face to face with life, and to acknowledge its seriousness, before that supreme hour when life itself is merged in a still greater mystery.

At the station, though it was a fine night, he found the closed carriage waiting for him, and even that circumstance oppressed him; he had always used the dog-cart, and a dismal sense of unwished-for ownership and mastery took possession of him as he stepped into the more pretentious vehicle. In answer to his eager inquiry, the coachman said that master had been main bad, as bad as a man could be with life in him (the phrase was delivered with that unctuousness which even the most devoted of family retainers always exhibit in describing a domestic calamity), but that he was now, the doctors thought, slightly better. Mr. Lucker, the local medical man, had, it seemed, taken up his quarters at the Tower, and had that day met Sir James Farquharson, from London, in consultation. Mr. Freeman, too, was hardly ever out of the house, and late as it was—it was past midnight—would be there on Richard's arrival. He found the rector, in fact, who had been listening for the carriage wheels, standing at the Hall door, with a face grave indeed, but less dejected than he had expected.

"Is there still hope?" asked the young man, tremulously.

"Thanks be to God, yes, my lad," answered the other. "But you must be prepared for a great change."

"Shall I see him now—to-night?"

"Oh yes; he pines for you as a sick man for

the morning; but you must say but very little. And, Richard—he cannot speak to you. Nay, you must show no weakness.” (The answering tears glistened in the honest rector’s eyes as he said this.) “He is not, Sir James enjoined upon us, to be unnecessarily excited. He was quite dumb for a few hours, but is slowly regaining speech. And you must be careful to come to his left side; the other is paralyzed.”

Half paralyzed himself, Richard followed the rector to his father’s room—a vast apartment that Queen Elizabeth was said to have once occupied, and which might have held half her court as well. It was now lighted by a small fire, though it was summer-time, and by one oil lamp, and even that was screened from the heavily hung and canopied bed, which, to the young man’s eyes, looked like a catafalque. He approached it very softly, but the rector heralded him in loud and distinct tones—“Talbot, here is Richard come to see you.”

There was a slow movement among the bed-clothes, and the boy felt his father’s hand—the left hand—clasping his arm and feebly drawing him toward him. He leaned forward and kissed the fevered brow and cheek in silence.

“I thank God! I thank God!” murmured a hoarse, clogged voice quite strange to him.

“There, you see, you have done your father good already,” said the rector, cheerfully. “He has not spoken like that since he was taken ill.”

Inarticulate as was the patient’s utterance, it was scarcely more so than was Richard’s rejoinder. His soul was shaken to its very depths.

The interview, if it could be called such, between father and son was a very long one. Twice Mr. Lucker, who was in the room, though Richard had not at first perceived him, came forward, watch in hand, and in the most dulcet tones suggested that there had been enough of talk—albeit, except for that one exclamation of the sick man, it had been all on Richard’s side—and each time the patient had given sign that his son’s words and presence were too dear to him to be dispensed with. At last, however, Richard himself made an effort to get away.

“You are tired, dear father, and must get some sleep. I shall be with you again in a few hours.” Then leaning down, he whispered, “Is there anything—anything—I can do for you? Is there anybody you would wish to see?”

The sick man was silent, but Richard fancied there was a wistful look in his eyes. “At such a time as this, dear father, would you not like to see Aunt Edith?”

“No,” was the unexpected reply, followed by a painful pause, and then the struggling words, “Not yet.”

CHAPTER XXXV.

VACILLATION.

To the young and thoughtless, sickness in the house is a strange, almost a weird experience. It seems contrary to Nature, and an infringement of her laws, that rooms should be hidden from the sun, and voices hushed, and that every one *should wear a grave face and tread softly. The questions that one puts to the other, “Has he slept well?” “What does the doctor say this*

morning?” seem like extracts from a sensational drama rather than the conversation of ordinary life. The very air seems heavy with the presage of woe, and, within doors, cannot be breathed with freedom. We are speaking, of course, of the surroundings of sickness unto death, or which may be unto death, as was the case with those of Francis Talbot. He was better, Mr. Lucker allowed; was slowly recovering speech, and even movement; but these admissions were not made with the cheerfulness with which that gentleman would certainly have made them if he could.

Mr. Lucker was a smooth man every way, and was prone to prophesy smooth things. He always wore a smile upon his mild Saxon face, but sometimes it was a pained smile: “I would give you hope if I could, my friend,” it then seemed to say to his patients, “but, as a matter of fact, there is no hope.” His voice was so gentle that it seemed to have been made for a sick-room, and it was never necessary for him to use that sound of all others a sick man hates to hear—a whisper. It may be, therefore, concluded that Mr. Lucker was not the parish doctor. He had a large and lucrative county practice, and was always terrifying the county by gentle hints that he was about to retire from the practice of his profession. He had met the great doctor from London in consultation on Mr. Talbot’s case upon equal terms, and Sir James had acknowledged the equality. “No course of treatment than that already pursued could have been more judicious,” had been his statement to Mr. Freeman; and, in answer to pressing inquiry, had said for self and colleague, “It would be idle to conceal that we think it a most serious case. Mr. Talbot may rally, but—” and he shook a head which had hinted death to kings and princes.

“You think, then, he may have another stroke, which would be fatal?”

“It would certainly be fatal,” said Sir James. This verdict the rector, as in duty bound, had communicated, with all tenderness, to Richard.

“It is what we must all come to, my dear lad; and when it is our turn, I pray Heaven that we may be found as well prepared to meet it as your dear father.”

“Do you think he knows?” asked Richard, in awe-struck tones.

“Yes, I do; this has been coming on for years, though he would never let me tell you. For anything that may have seemed to you amiss in him, Richard—I mean, any lack in demonstrativeness of affection—there was a physical cause.”

Richard moved his hand impatiently. “He was always kinder to me than I deserved,” he said. But his heart smote him because he had not always thought so, and had made no allowance for such shortcomings. “I am not sure, Mr. Freeman,” he presently added, “that you are right about my father’s knowledge of his critical state.” And then he told him of his mention of Aunt Edith the previous night, and how the sick man had first answered “No,” and then “Not yet.”

The rector was silent; the fact being that he had already turned over this particular matter in his own mind: he had felt a moral responsibility regarding Edith, which had, however, been in part removed by his wife’s arguments.

“You will do more harm than good,” she said, “by mentioning his sister to the squire. Even

if he wishes to see her, their meeting will be prejudicial to him."

And the rector had answered, dubiously, "Perhaps."

"I have made up my mind what to do," said Richard, decisively. "I shall telegraph at once to Gresham Street, and explain how matters stand."

"Then your aunt will be here to-night."

"I know it; but my father need not be told. Only if he wishes to see her, when—I mean at any time—she will be on the spot."

"You will act as you please, Richard," answered the rector, with feigned indifference, for at the same time he was saying to himself, "This lad, with all his failings, has a good heart."

Mr. Talbot was decidedly better. There were indications of reviving sensibility in his numbed and rigid limbs, and his speech was less thick and slow. He did not, however, speak much, but lay, with his hand in that of his son, waiting, as it seemed to Richard, for more strength. That wistful look had again come into his eyes which had already attracted the young man's attention, and with every hour it grew more importunate. Presently, late in the afternoon, when Richard had returned to him after half an hour's absence, he began to speak with tolerable distinctness, though at first in jerks and snatches, very distressing to the ear on which they fell.

"I want to be alone with you, Richard." There was no one in the room but quiet Mr. Lucker, and he was sitting with a book in his hand in a bay-window far away out of sight and hearing. Nevertheless, Richard crossed over to the doctor, and told him what his father had said.

Mr. Lucker looked up with mild surprise, but closed his book, and, with one glance at his patient, left the room as noiselessly as a shadow.

"That is a clever fellow," said the squire, musingly; "but he will never set me on my legs again." Then, "Are they all gone, Richard? Are we quite alone?" he asked.

"We are quite alone, father."

"Then lock the door."

Richard's heart beat as he did so. He felt that something of importance—what even a dying man thinks to be of importance—was about to be revealed to him. Perhaps Leonard Greene was right, and his father was going to require him to give some promise respecting his future conduct; but if so, there seemed no need for such extraordinary precautions.

"Richard—child of my heart, listen to me. I lie here a sinful man, but one who has confessed as much for many a year, and who hopes for salvation. But there is one thing—it may be a sin or not—which I have committed, and never confessed to any mortal ear—a secret that would have died with me but for your importunity."

Richard made a gesture of astonishment.

"Yes, boy; you have asked to hear it many times; whenever, indeed, of late you have mentioned your aunt Edith's name. The knowledge of it may be your worldly ruin, but I must needs tell it now, while there is yet time. If she were but here—"

"Father, she is here—under this very roof."

"What! Edith at the Tower?"

"Yes, sir; I ventured to send to her this morning. I wrote, 'My father is very ill. He may not wish to see you, and if so, you must make no

attempt to intrude upon him. But if you care to come upon the chance—'"

"And she did come?"

"Upon the instant, father, as I knew she would."

"Miserable boy, what have you done!"

The sick man groaned, and closed his eyes; but presently his lips began to murmur solemn words, as though appealing to God's guidance.

Alarmed at the effect his conduct had produced, Richard began to make excuse for it. "I did what I thought right, father, in sending for Aunt Edith. You need not see her, if it distresses you to do so; nor need she know that you are aware of her presence here."

"You are not to blame, boy; it is the finger of God," answered the sick man, calmly. "Since it seems good to him that you should not succeed to the inheritance of your father, so be it."

Richard stared, as well he might. He thought that his father's mind was wandering.

"Yes," continued the squire, in slow, mechanical tones, "I will drain this cup of bitterness to the dregs. Since she is here, she shall learn all from my own lips, and in the presence of my own child. Perchance that may move her. Call her in and let her sit yonder"—pointing to a chair remote from the bed—"and keep you close to me, Richard."

"But, father dear, do you feel strong enough?"

"Yes," interrupted the sick man, impatiently; "go fetch her;" then added wearily to himself, "Let me tell the truth and die."

His dull ear did not catch the opening and closing of the door, and a quick shudder of surprise came over him when he heard Richard say, "She is here, father."

"I don't see her," answered the squire, with his eyes fixed on the vacant chair.

"She is on her knees by your bedside."

Then he became aware of a dim figure clothed in gray, with palms clasped together and a beseeching face, and he drew his wasted hand away, as if to avoid her touch.

"Brother, do not shrink from me!" pleaded Edith's gentle voice.

"You will shrink from me, when you have heard all," answered the squire, in hollow tones. "Listen."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CONFESSION.

"THERE was a time, Edith," began the sick man, slowly, "when you and I were friends, but it is so far back that I can scarce recall it. So soon as you began to think for yourself, you drew apart from me."

She shook her head, and a faint smile passed over her features, but he took no notice of it.

"You were not to blame, though it seemed hard to me, for I was wild and reckless; and it might have seemed right to you to mark your disapproval of my conduct. But you were somewhat young, being fourteen or fifteen, for the rôle of mentor."

"If I ever seemed to play that part, Francis," interrupted Edith, softly, "I ask your pardon. It was most presumptuous and unfitting."

"That in any case," answered the other, coldly; "but, as I believe, you had your solid rea-

sons for it. You had formed a deliberate plan to supplant me in the affections of my father."

"Francis!" Only his name, but with as much tender reproach in the way of speaking it as a volume could convey.

"Yes, at that time, to supplant me in his affections," continued the squire, in tones which, although harsh, he strove in vain to render distinct and incisive. "It was not till afterward, when you had embraced a false faith, and listened to the specious arguments of its ministers, that you turned your attention to more material matters, and strove to oust me as my father's heir."

"Never, never!" cried Edith, earnestly.

"What! do you dare to tell me that no priest bade you plot and plan against me?"

"I did not say that, Francis; I said I had never done it."

"Quibbler! You should have been a priest yourself. You that are vowed to Heaven, and wear that unseemly garb in token of it, how can you lie so?"

"As to my attire, brother," answered Edith, gently, "that, as Richard knows, is my usual dress. I wished to appear here otherwise—and since it vexes you, I would I had; but I am not mistress of myself in such matters."

"Hark, how she owns she is priest-rid!" muttered the squire, scornfully.

"Still I did not plot," pleaded Edith, firmly.

"Not on your own account, perhaps. You were a tool, a mouth-piece; but they plotted through you. First, when I was but a castaway; and afterward, with tenfold virulence, when I abjured a life of sin and came to the knowledge of the Truth. Then you, or those who moulded you to their will, endeavored to persuade my father that my new resolutions for good were false and hypocritical; that I did but affect penitence to win his favor; and that he would be setting a bad example to fathers if he permitted me to remain his heir, while you, forsooth, the angel of the house, who ministered to his wants so diligently, only received a daughter's share of his estate. They never told him how they hated the Truth to which I had been called, and were resolved, if possible, to turn his wealth, through you, into channels of their own. Hoodwinked by them, yet conscious of the wrong you were doing to me and mine, you, on your part, strove to cozen the old man out of his lands and gold."

The squire paused, exhausted; and although, for the first time, Edith's pale face was touched with fire at his cruel words, her voice had more of pity in it than of scorn, as she replied:

"Francis, you do me wrong. I never strove—so help me Heaven!—to win your inheritance away from you; and as for that of your boy, let him speak for himself, and tell you if he thinks I could rob him."

"Indeed, father, I do not," said Richard, simply. "Aunt Edith, next to yourself, has been the kindest friend I ever had."

"And yet she would have beggared you. I hold the proof of it—the written proof."

"If so," said Edith, calmly, "it is a forgery."

"You hear her, Richard?" answered the sick man. "She says, a forgery. But presently she will change her note. These convent birds are taught to sing to any tune. When my father died, his will was a matter of surprise to those

who knew how a certain person had striven to warp the old man's mind. It was even conjectured that there must be a later will annulling it, for which search was made, no doubt."

"No search was made, to my knowledge," said Edith, quietly. "Our father's will was found in his desk, where it was known to lie. Its provisions were, in my judgment, just ones, and in accordance with my own expectations."

"You had expectations, then!" observed the squire, sardonically. "You were not so wholly taken up with pious offices as to be oblivious to possibilities."

"The subject was much discussed by others," answered Edith, calmly, "and I could not shut my ears to them."

"Just so; the Jesuits were all agape for Talbot Tower, I know. They deemed it would drop like a ripe fruit into their ravening maw; but it did not—just then. I came home with my child to the old house, and have lived there ever since, its acknowledged master. But when Richard here was six years old, a certain circumstance happened which will have an interest for you, *Sister Edith*." With use, the squire had recovered the full mastery of his powers of speech, and the scornful stress he laid on the word "*Sister*" was equal to a folio of abhorrence. It was not his words which were exhausting his feeble frame, but the bitterness of the thoughts that prompted them.

"Did you send for me, Francis, to your sick-bed that you might speak your worst of me before your son?" inquired Edith, reproachfully.

"No. I sent for you to tell you of something to your advantage, which you, and they whom you call yours, will reap at my son's expense," was the cold reply. "Do you remember, Richard, the first time—and the last—when you and I fell out, fourteen years ago and more, in this very room—about a drum?"

"Now you speak of it, I do, father; though I had forgotten it."

"Ah! I have not forgotten. You came in, as usual, while I was getting up, beating your drum; the harsh, rude noise was music to me, because you made it. Yet I took it away from you that morning, boy, and you never saw it more."

"I remember now, father, and how bitterly I cried about it," said Richard.

"Yes; but your bitterness passed away, and mine abode with me. You altered not, and yet you were never the same boy to me again. My pride and joy had become an instrument of torture to me. Whenever I looked upon you henceforth, I said to myself, 'He has opened my eyes to what I would not have seen.' I loved you all the same, but your presence was distasteful to me."

"I have noticed that," said Richard, with simplicity.

"I feared so. Moreover, as you grew up, you often unconsciously gave me pain. Not once, nor twice, but many times, you have put in a word for your aunt here, as though I had not my own good reasons for knowing friends from enemies. Once you said there was never a doubt of what was the right thing to do, if one gave one's mind to fair play. That barb went to my heart and rankled there. Now you must know why, though the knowledge will cost you dear. In my dressing-case you will find the key of yonder cabinet. Open it."

Richard did so. It was a chest of Indian manufacture, full of small drawers mounted on one large one, and a faint odor of sandal-wood filled the room as the doors swung back.

"You look very weary, Francis," said Edith, gently; "you are overtaking your strength."

"The large drawer," murmured the squire, impatiently. "Take out what it contains."

It was a child's drum.

Richard and Edith interchanged glances of dismay; the thought occurred to each that the squire was wandering in his wits.

"You had broken that drum," the sick man continued, "and on the morning of which I speak you came to tell me that the butler had repaired it with a piece of parchment found on a shelf in the monument-room. Read what is written on it aloud."

"It is difficult," said Richard; "I do not understand the handwriting, and the damp has injured it; but it seems to be the fragment of a will."

"It is your grandfather's will, made subsequent to that which made me master here; and it is signed by his old game-keeper Sutton and Mr. Jordan, at that time rector of Durnton. If you cannot read it, your aunt can, for she probably dictated the terms of it herself. 'Whereas I have cause to be dissatisfied with my son Francis, I hereby revoke all previous wills and testaments, and leave to my beloved daughter Edith, etc., etc.' Who does not recognize the Roman hand?"

"Let me see it!" exclaimed Edith, rising to her feet.

"How she pricks her ears as the corn-bin opens!" murmured the sick man, scornfully. "Yes, all is right, madam; and our father, as you will doubtless say, only did what he would with his own. The will is good, and you may prosecute my corpse to-morrow for having fraudulently concealed it. The law may look upon it in that light, for what I know. I do not seek to justify myself either to it or you. I did what I thought right to save the broad lands of Durnton from falling into the hands of scheming priests, and aiding a false faith to gain more proselytes. You think, of course, I did it for Richard's sake, or for my own. Think what you will; God is my judge."

"And mine, Francis," answered Edith, solemnly. "Your confidence comes late, but yet I thank you for it. If you thought that I should take the Tower from your boy or you, this avowal, though tardy, is well made."

"It is not only the Tower, I tell you," answered the squire, passionately. "You have all—"

"What matters if it were all England?" answered Edith. "If you had but said to yourself, 'She will give it back; she will never rob the boy, whom she pretends to love, of his inheritance; if you had but credited me, oh, Francis—your own sister—with one generous feeling!'"

"Mark how she will swallow it all, notwithstanding that sweet oil!" muttered the squire, contemptuously. "After slaver, with the serpent, comes deglutition."

Suddenly there was a crackling noise, and a bright jet leaped up from the low fire. Edith had thrown the drum upon it.

"What have you done?" cried Richard, trem-

ulously, as he ran forward to snatch it from the flames.

"Done? I have done what I would with my own," was her calm reply. "You may get it mended, Richard, for your first boy, as you did in your own case." The drum itself he had rescued, but its parchment ends were burned away. It might be of use, as his aunt had said, as a toy again; but not a vestige of old Reginald Talbot's will remained to it.

"Father, she has burned the will," said Richard, softly. "Did not I tell you how noble and generous she was? Without a moment's hesitation or thought of self—"

"You are wrong there," interrupted Edith, quickly, with her hand pressed to her heart; "but, thank Heaven, I have surmounted it. You are very welcome, Dick. Francis." She moved to the bed foot. The sick man did not close his eyes as before, when her gaze rested on him, but regarded her with a wondering look, which softened more and more, till presently the tears stole down his haggard face.

"I have been too bitter against you, Edith," he murmured. "Your kindness has robbed me of my strength, or I would ask your pardon; let Richard here be my intercessor."

"You need none, brother, save Him whom we all need. I, too, perhaps, have been bitter against you, or seemed to be so."

Richard took her hand and led her gently to his father's side. "We have not kissed one another, Francis, for twenty years," she said, as she bent down over the sick man. "Let us never, never quarrel again."

"That I may safely promise, Edith," answered the squire, with a faint smile. It was easy to see what he meant. The excitement which had hitherto sustained him had passed away and left him feeble indeed; his wrath had, in fact, been his strength, and now that its fire was quenched, the light of life itself began to glimmer low. The hand which Edith held was thinner even than her own, and had no power to return her gentle clasp. Still the ruling thought of his later days was uppermost. "You will not take advantage, Edith," he whispered in her ear, "of the debt my Richard owes you to—to lead him from his father's faith?"

"He shall never be reminded that he owes me anything, Francis."

"That is not what I asked," returned the other, his failing eyes lit up with a gleam of suspicion. "You have not promised."

"I do promise," sighed Edith. There was a long silence, during which the tick of the Louis Quatorze clock upon the mantel-piece smote painfully upon Richard's ear: it seemed to be measuring out his father's span of life. Presently Edith moved without a sound, and motioned to him to take her place by his father's pillow. A great change had come over the sick man's face; the shadow of death was on it. But his brain was still at work; presently he whispered, hoarsely, "He lies! he has got the card." Edith cast at her nephew an agonized look; it was terrible to her that the thoughts of the dying man should stray into such channels. Richard, of course, knew that his father's mind had recurred to the scene in Paris with De Blaise.

"That was long ago, father," said he, gently, "and you have made amends."

The sick man opened his failing eyes and fixed them on his son.

"Kiss me, Dick!" he murmured. They were the last words of Francis Talbot.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

GOOD RESOLUTIONS.

WHEN a man dies, it is said, he is forgotten; but this, in fact, does not take place, though I have known exceptions, till after he is buried. On the contrary, his death awakens memories of him that have slumbered in many breasts for years. There were scores of men whose recollections were thus aroused by the announcement of the demise of Francis Talbot. They had known him as a man about town, a "man of honor" (so called) and fashion; and then he had suddenly disappeared from their sight and knowledge. It was generally understood that he had "taken to religion"—just as one should say, "He went mad, poor fellow!"—but there were stout old stagers who still believed that "some woman was at the bottom of it," which was their key for every mystery.

These personages wagged their heads and tongues together over the "melancholy event," by no means in a melancholy manner, but rather as the Irish wake their corpses. The "religious world" had also a good deal to say about their convert "whose latter days had redeemed the errors of his youth." His story was commented upon from many a pulpit, though not from that of Durnton Regis: the dead man was too near and dear to the rector to be made the subject of psychological analysis, though he spoke of his open hand and kindly heart, as he well might; for in the dead squire, though society might not miss him, the poor had lost a friend.

Old Walter Pole came to the funeral, notwithstanding that he had sworn never to set foot in "that fellow Freeman's church," from the day on which the rector had declined a certain invitation to the manor, on the ground that he could not visit at the house "where the card-table had its attractions." His ample, handsome face looked very grave as it gazed on the coffin of his quondam friend.

"A man has no right," he was thinking, "to die at that comparatively early age, and make his contemporaries, and, much more, his elders, feel uncomfortable."

But after some soup and sherry he grew more cheerful, and offered in confidence to bet his grandson Henry a five-pound note that the heir would marry that scoundrel Parkes's daughter within six months. He had never forgiven Richard for not running away with the girl in the usual way; in which case, as he asserted, he would have tired of her in a fortnight, and the whole affair have been settled for fifty pounds.

The heads of families of half the county partook of the funeral meal at the Tower that day, which had not held such a concourse, as some observed, since the hounds used to meet there in old Reginald Talbot's time.

Leonard Greene, though funerals were hateful to him, had hastened to Durnton on the news of the squire's death, and his presence was inexpressibly welcome to Richard. Kindness and

sympathy alone had brought him, but the sight of Henry Pole struck a certain chord which had not been touched for years, and he took the first opportunity of asking after his sister, and then, in a casual way, after her friend, Miss Meredith.

"Oh, she is no longer Miss Meredith; she has married a missionary and gone out to the Pacific. I thought at one time you might have been Mr. Right yourself."

"Oh, I was not Centaur enough," said Mr. Greene.

"Well, I do not know that that would have made much difference, for I hear that she has gone to live in an island where there are no horses."

"That would be just the place for me," answered the other, with a smile, as if at his own incompetency in the saddle.

But the fact was that it was a very bitter smile. Mr. Greene's hilarious exterior concealed a very tender and, indeed, a morbidly sensitive disposition. To the superficial observer he seemed like a vessel built of cork, that, so far as sinking was concerned, might defy the heaviest artillery of fate; that, if it riddled him through and through, he would be little the worse for it, and would still have replied with his small-arms and light carronades. But he was by no means so seaworthy as he looked. Moreover, the very weapons that he employed were, in the hands of others, fatal to himself. One does not become impervious to small shot because one is in the habit of sparrow-shooting. He had really been deeply smitten with Miss Meredith. Probably she had had nothing in common with him but kindliness of disposition, and they would soon have wearied of one another; but he followed the good advice of the wittiest of divines in one respect—he "took short views." If only her guardian had not misunderstood his offer in so absurd a manner, the two young people, so far as he was concerned, might have been married—and been separated—by this time; but the shaft of ridicule had entered into his soul.

From that fatal hour he had never ventured to address the beloved object seriously while they were under the same roof; to write to her he found still more difficult; and even the inquiries he had made about her from time to time he had not had the courage to put to those likely to be the best informed, or in such a manner as to elicit the information he most desired. Anne Meredith had occupied a little chamber in his soul for years—for some time, it now seemed, even after she had become Anne something else—and this sudden vacancy of the shrine was a considerable shock to him. He probably felt it quite as deeply as any proprietor of a little cottage in the country, very picturesque but difficult to let, who has lost his tenant. The blow, indeed, far from stunning him—which would have been an acknowledgment of his weakness, and was therefore not to be permitted for an instant—rather stimulated his energies, and caused Mr. Luckier, who shared a mourning-coach with him, to describe him as the most charming companion—for a funeral—that it had ever been his good-fortune to meet.

And Mr. Greene returned the compliment by conferring on the gentle doctor the sobriquet of "Lucca oil," and expressing his opinion that so harmonious a practitioner must set his patients'

bones to music. A manuscript poem is also extant of this date, and in Mr. G.'s handwriting, which describes a course of medical treatment in very attractive and mellifluous terms, and has for its refrain these, I venture to think, original lines:

"Tis ho for the merry, merry, merry blue-pill,
And the black, black draught in the morning."

These flights of fun were merely indications that Mr. Greene's mind was disturbed, just as serious people under like conditions pitch into their poor relations, or passionate persons indulge in bad language. His behavior under the solemn circumstances was, it must be understood, perfectly decorous. But it requires a very dull man indeed to be consistently sombre throughout the funeral obsequies of any one, not personally dear to him, as they are performed in this enlightened land. The mutes, the plumes, the horses, the coaches, are no doubt designed—first, to swell the undertaker's bill; and, secondly, to make the idea of death as much like a nightmare as possible. But human nature resents the hideous oppression, and sometimes breaks out in what we may call "the contrary direction." In Scotland, as is well known, interments are the chief public amusements, and it is said of a young man that "he goes about a good deal to funerals," just in the same sense that we deplore his frequenting music-halls and casinos.

It was impossible that a man like Francis Talbot, who had been a recluse for twenty years, and had rejected all overtures of friendship from his neighbors, should draw tears from them over his remains. The contents of his will, on the other hand, commanded their gravest attention. Every one was surprised to find how comparatively poor he had died; for, though allowed to have been of a generous disposition, it was thought that he must have saved money during his long seclusion. What there was, however, was left to "my son Richard, absolutely," viz., the very considerable estate of Durnton Tower, and about fifteen thousand pounds; the family lawyer and Mr. Freeman being appointed trustees for the lad—an office that was almost a sinecure, since in a few months he would attain his majority.

"What on earth could Talbot have done with his money?" was the question that every one put to his neighbor when these facts were made known. "Begad, he was not such a saint, after all, perhaps," whispered one to the squire of Masham Manor; "he must have had some private expenses."

"Not a bit of it," answered old Pole; "he has been paying off his mortgages"—a way of frittering away ready money for which the speaker's tone evinced his profound contempt.

His observation, however, was a shrewd one, and to some extent correct. When Francis Talbot succeeded to the family estate he had had to pay large sums, borrowed at ruinous interest, upon his expectations; he had now left it free and unencumbered to his son, with one proviso—not in the body of the will, but in a memorandum found within it for Richard's private eye—namely, that he should pay four hundred pounds a year to Charles de Blaise.

Whatever was the general opinion, the heir, when his grief permitted him to think of such

matters, which was not until days afterward, was more than satisfied with what had accrued to him. It seemed to him an ample fortune; and, then, but for his aunt Edith's generous behavior, he would have been penniless! He would have acknowledged as much, again and again, to her, if she would have permitted him; but her grave, pained face forbade it. She smiled, indeed, as she repeated her old phrase, "You are welcome, my dear boy," but it was plain the subject was distressing to her. He thought this was on account of his father's behavior in the matter, which was certainly open to the gravest censure; but that was not the case. Edith had not only frankly accepted her brother's excuse for his conduct, but fully believed in the motives he had attributed to it. She knew to what lengths religious fanaticism would carry even scrupulous men.

In her pocket was a letter from her spiritual adviser, the Rev. Gerald Vane, to whom she confessed everything, as in duty bound, censuring her in the strongest terms for having, "in a moment of culpable weakness," destroyed her father's will. She had not informed him—for she did "stop somewhere," even in obedience to the Church—of the fact of its having been so long designedly concealed from her; but had led him to conclude that the document had been quite recently discovered.

"You are flattered, no doubt," he wrote, "at having made a sacrifice to kinship; but I must needs tell you it was not at your own expense, but at that of our holy cause. You have placed the fortune that would have supported it, and been the means of saving souls, in the hands of one who will lose his own soul in lavishing the money on unworthy objects. If you felt your weakness, as you acknowledge, at the very time you made this false step, why did you not, at least, wait for my advice? Your punishment will be to see the fruits of this ill-judged generosity." And, indeed, poor Sister Edith already saw, in her mind's eye, on the one hand, certain excellent institutions for the advancement of true religion languishing for want of funds, and on the other the career of a spendthrift.

Mr. Vane's letter contained exhortations as well as reproof, and even some practical suggestions. "Could she not appeal," it hinted, "to a young man's sense of right, not as yet perhaps utterly obscured by evil courses, and get something back out of the fire?"

No, she could not. What she had given, she had given. The Rev. Gerald Vane knew, as he fancied, his fair penitent thoroughly, but she was different from many of those he had shriven in a far higher rank of life, in being that rarity—rarer even than a true gentleman—a true gentlewoman. Her feelings of delicacy, generosity, and tenderness could resist even priestly authority in a case of this kind; and they did resist it. If Father Vane could have spoken to her in person, matters might, perhaps, have gone better for him; but a visit to the Tower at such a time would indeed have been inopportune. It would also have been very dangerous, for Richard—especially if he had guessed his errand—would have pitched him into the moat, and the rector would have held his head under.

Not a word even did Edith say of the "talent" thus intrusted to Richard—his newly ac-

quired fortune. If the voice of the dead failed just then to touch him, she rightly concluded that the voice of the living would have no weight. But, to do him justice, Richard was for the moment, as Mr. Greene afterward expressed it, "a prey" to good resolutions. If he could not adopt his father's opinions, he would at least lead such a life as his father would have approved of; he would never forget how good he had been to him, nor the cross he had borne so many years for his sake. Such was the view he endeavored to take of his father's concealment of the will, though it really shocked his sense of right, and he would not have let others know of it for twice the fortune it had brought to him.

For the present, he decided to go back to Cambridge—"to take his degree," as was given out; but in truth he cared very little about his degree. His mind, devoted to reflection, was in a state of chaos, and could only decide upon getting away from the Tower as soon as possible. He left it with his friend, a few hours after the departure of Aunt Edith.

"Was I right about your poor father?" asked Greene, suddenly, as they sat in the train together—"I mean about his having something on his mind?"

"Yes, you were. He had no request, however, to make of me, as you imagined."

Richard's face was scarlet as he said this, and Greene pushed his inquiries no farther. In his secret heart he believed that, for the first time in his life, his friend had told him a lie.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MR. GREENE IS APPRECIATED AT LAST.

IN these grasping days it is the fashion to sneer at a modest competence, and especially to speak ill of it in the hands of youth. It is said to take away "the incentive to exertion;" to prevent, that is, the necessity of its possessor throwing himself, sword in hand, upon that oyster, the world, along with the rest of his contemporaries, and scattering grit and slime, in their frantic attempts to open it, in all directions. Considering the dirt that he has but too often to eat before he gets at the oyster, I am not convinced of the wholesomeness of this discipline. On the other hand, if it is not an advantage to a young man to be poor, riches are a greater snare on entering life than at any other period. About half of those who are thus situated go to the dogs in one way or another (generally on horseback), and never come back again. Imagine what it must be for a youth of even very moderate powers of observation to see nineteen-twentieths of his seniors—including even his spiritual pastors and masters—toiling and molling, and grasping and claspings, and sweating and fretting—just as the waters came down at Lodore—after that of which he already possesses an abundance without exertion! It must almost seem to him that he has attained all which makes life worth having. The consideration with which he is treated on account of his possession of the precious commodity—only second to that which is paid to one *who has the unspeakable merit of having succeeded to a title—must be also what the Scotch call "upsetting."* And, above all, the gates of

pleasure are open to him in all directions at a time when he has strength, and taste, and appetite to enjoy it. It is my opinion that a good young man with four thousand a year deserves to be canonized.

Mr. Richard Talbot, albeit there was already a saint in his family, showed no sign of earning this distinction. The impression produced by his father's death and burial, the generosity of his aunt, the kindly advice of Mrs. Freeman, and the vague voice of duty soon passed away. He had been always "fast," but his pace became now greatly accelerated. He discovered, for the first time, that he had one special faculty—namely, for spending money. It ran out of his pockets as though they had holes in them; his fingers could no more retain it than if it had been water. The university, he soon found, did not afford sufficient scope for the indulgence of this passion; and he left it in a few months for London—and without a degree. He had plenty of money, he said, when remonstrated with by the rector, to buy one in Germany, if it was so absolutely necessary; but, for his part, he felt he should be neither better nor worse for being a B.A. The money it cost in fees might be expended much more advantageously in a dinner at Richmond.

This was sad; but what the rector felt more keenly was that the young man refused point-blank to come to the Tower to celebrate his majority. The tenantry were welcome to their entertainment, the poor to their doles; he quite enjoyed giving *carte blanche* for everything in that way; but why should his presence be necessary to the roasting of the ox?

"He will one day come home, like the Prodigal," thought the rector, bitterly; "only there will be no ox, nor even a fattened calf."

He felt, and not unnaturally, that in this particular Richard should, even if his own sense of duty had failed to prompt him, have acceded to the wishes of his father's friend. There was, indeed, that tie, as the young man acknowledged; but otherwise there was no sort of sympathy between Mr. Freeman and himself; he dissented from his views, he disliked his sermons, and had no intention of following his advice. The only advice that Richard now did take was that of some very clever acquaintances of his who had always the earliest intelligence, to believe their own account, concerning racing matters, and who were, therefore, in a position to put their friends up to all the "good things;" for, being idle and wealthy, this young Englishman's mind turned as naturally to the turf as the needle to the pole.

Unhappily, however, he was not so sharp as the needle; and on his very first Derby a great misfortune befell him. Imagine him, very accurately dressed, on the box-seat of somebody's drag, going down the road to witness the great national "event." Recall, if you can, reader, your own first experience of a Derby—the dust, the heat, the Babel of vile sounds, the champagne-lunch devoured in inexpressible discomfort, the taking or the giving of the odds in your new betting-book—and spare me the narration of the details. Flushed with wine and excitement, Richard stuck to the horse that had been pointed out to him as "a moral," like a man; nay, like a Centaur. He would hedge nothing, but "put the pot on" as only a very young or a

desperate man ever does put it. Unhappily (for otherwise the burnt child might in future have shunned the fire), he not only "put it on," but "pulled it off"—he won a small fortune, a success which, it is needless to say, he attributed to his own sagacity. It is said that the devil helps beginners—a fact one had better not insist upon, lest it should cause a still greater number of young people to try their luck; but it is certain that when he does assist them in this manner, it is for his own ends. It is their first step to ruin.

Leonard Greene, who was now himself settled in town, in lodgings in the Adelphi, perceived with regret, on every visit that he paid to the club chambers in Pall Mall, where Richard had established himself, that that young gentleman was growing more and more infatuated with the turf mania. If he had been a commercial traveller, he could scarcely have attended more assiduously to his new business—which was that of frequenting every race meeting of importance in the United Kingdom.

"I have become quite a business man, old fellow," said Dick himself. "If you would but look at my book, you would see that I leave nothing to chance—that can possibly be avoided." This latter phrase had reference to a bad debt or two, of which he had already had experience; but, as a matter of fact, the young fellow had become very business-like and methodical, so far as his accounts were concerned. He had bought a book with "Winnings" printed on one page, and "Losings" on the other, the item "won on Derby" occupying a proud position on the former page, but, unhappily, all to itself. Some men, who are ruining themselves and know it, are still wont to keep an accurate account of their downward career, just as a poor shipwrecked wretch jots down in his diary all the said records of his fate to the day he dies. Richard already prided himself in "making a book," not, indeed, so as to be absolutely safe, but so as always to win a good stake—if he did win.

"My poor Dick," said Greene, glancing somewhat contemptuously at his friend's figures, "you remind me of a man among thieves, who, being aware of his position, is so prudent that he holds his hat on with both hands to preserve it, while they pick his pockets."

But he might as well have preached to the winds. All that he could do for his friend was to lead him as much as possible into other channels of pleasure and excitement. Mr. Greene's own hobby was not a very promising one; but it was at least cheaper to keep than Richard's. It was the stage. He firmly believed himself to be a dramatic genius, and all his efforts were directed to spread this simple faith, especially among stage-managers, an incredulous race, and the more difficult to convince of his capabilities, from the fact that they would not read his plays, though in some cases they had the courtesy to assert that they had done so.

He had a splendid tragedy in five acts, in manuscript, which was a source of much apprehension to Talbot. His friend had once tentatively observed, "I will read it to you, some day, old fellow, if you will allow me." And Richard was always afraid, when they were alone together, and more than usually confidential, that this *frightful threat* would be put into execution,

whether he "allowed" it or not. There are some things the strain of which no friendship, however firmly linked, can bear. If Orestes himself had said to Pylades, "I have a drama here in manuscript," and then proceeded to inflict it on him, their intimacy would never have become historical. The obligation of listening to such a thing is not insisted upon by even the most Christian writers. But short of this, Talbot would have done anything to oblige his friend; and he sympathized most loyally in the disappointments and defeats he suffered at the hands of his natural enemies, the managers.

One morning Greene called at his friend's rooms earlier than usual. The latter had only just finished his breakfast, for it was scarcely noon. He was lolling moodily in an arm-chair, with an immense cigar in his mouth, and what he called his "ledger" in his hand—a very diminutive sort of ledger, bound in morocco, with silver clasps, and furnished with a metallic pencil.

"Well, Pussy, how goes it? You look blooming."

"I wish I could return the compliment. What makes you seem so down upon your luck, old fellow?"

"Why, my luck having been down upon me. Do you remember what I told you the other day about the brother to Boanerges?"

"I never heard of Boanerges himself," returned Greene, with studied indifference.

"Tut, tut! I mean the favorite for 'the Metropolitan.' I told you of the tip I had direct from the stable—how he was a perfect certainty, and yet you could get any odds about him. In twenty-four hours they went down from twenty to one to five. I could have made a competence out of it if I pleased."

"I see, however, that you didn't please."

"Of course not; I went in for the big thing, as any fellow would have done, and should have been a millionaire by this time but for my infernal luck. The horse could have won in a canter."

"Then why didn't he?"

"Why, d—n him, because he's dead!"

"That seems hard," said Greene, reflectively.

"I don't think even the theologians damn anybody for dying."

"My dear fellow, it's no joking matter. I have lost ten thousand pounds by that beast."

"Ten thousand pounds!"

"Yes; that is to say, I ought to have won it, and I didn't—that is what I call losing it; and I have lost nearly three thousand. You would be astonished if you knew what I'd lost since May."

"Nothing would astonish me in that way, Dick," answered the other, gravely. "You lost your wits, in my opinion, when you won your first stake at Epsom."

"Ay, that was a good haul, wasn't it?" said Richard, brightening up a little. "If we could only do that sort of thing every day! but somehow, since then, everything has gone quite contrary. Here's the end of the season, and hardly a chance left of recouping one's self."

"That is fortunate, at all events," answered the other, dryly. "Not but that you have plenty of ways of ruining yourself besides horse-racing, before the season begins again."

"No doubt," answered Dick, laughing; "I

could check five or six of them off at once on my fingers—"

"Check them, but not on your fingers," interrupted Greene, sardonically. "I am sick and tired of telling you what a fool you are. However, I am come this morning to humor your taste for extravagance. You shall take some stalls at the theatre where my play is coming out."

"Your play? Oh, Puss, I'm so glad! So you have got these stage villains to appreciate your talents at last. I will take twenty stalls. Is it that five-act thingamibob?"

"No; it is not the tragedy, if that is what you mean by the thingamibob. It is that rather neat little comedy (if I may say so) that was acted at Cambridge. It is not coming out 'neat,' of course—it will have to be mixed with something. My play—they call it a farce, confound their impudence!—will be played first, and then this *piège de resistance*—something no fellow can stand."

"And where is it to be?"

"At the Imperial."

"Oh, by jingo! I most sincerely congratulate you, Puss. You will be quite a great man."

"I shall be no greater for being at last appreciated," observed Mr. Greene, who, it may be perceived, if he had not the dramatic genius, had at least one of the weaknesses incident to its possessors; "but I confess that it gives me great pleasure to feel that my play is going to have a chance, and that my friends—and especially you, Dick—will see 'The Suitors' placed on the stage as it should be."

"That will be charming," answered Talbot, with a little embarrassment, arising from the recollection of how he had yawned over it at Cambridge and been found out by the author. "But when is it to be?"

"Well, I am sorry to say, not till late in the autumn. It is not the usual company at the Imperial who will play it. The theatre has been taken on 'spec' by Madame Lucinda—a singing woman—and she will have rather a scratch lot. But it's better than nothing, of course; and then, the Imperial is the Imperial, you know."

"True, even if there's nobody in it," added Dick, unconscious of satire.

"Just so," said Mr. Greene, without moving a muscle. "In August, there is nothing so pleasant as an empty house. However, I may rely upon your presence, old fellow?"

"I will come if I live," said Dick, "and I am not thinking of dying."

Which, alas! was very true.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

RECOGNITION.

I ONCE knew a spendthrift who ran through three fortunes, and was afflicted with much melancholy upon his death-bed because he had just come into a fourth, which it was impossible, from the nature of the circumstances, that he could run through. He was exceptionally favored by fate in being able to the very last to enjoy the habit of extravagance, which often falls on others even before the means of indulging it have failed them; and, of course, he was

still more fortunate in having the fortunes. Most spendthrifts have but one in a lifetime—and this last was the truth, since less material arguments were obviously useless, that Mr. Leonard Greene endeavored to impress upon his young friend.

Richard Talbot had as many excuses, and as fanciful ones, for spending money as old Burton gives for indulging in melancholy. His property—for his income, as we may well imagine, had little to do with it—was small, as compared with that of many other spendthrifts; but yet he had contrived within a very few months to become notorious, even in London, and in this very common line of business. The race-horse is, of course, the swiftest animal for getting rid of a man's money; but there are many other methods of accomplishing this object at a quick rate. What Richard wanted, for example, in skill at the game of whist, he made up for in the amount of stake, and this was not objected to in certain scientific circles; then the theatre and its belongings cost him considerable more than his seat in the stalls and the shilling fee to the attendant; and his hospitalities at Richmond and Greenwich were boundless. "The world," or what is called such, is not so very large, after all, and the heir of Talbot Tower had got to be tolerably well known in it, and even beyond it. Down at Durnton it was impossible that folks should be ignorant of his goings on, because the family lawyer had been already in communication with him in connection with the "realization" of a certain portion of the estate; and, somehow or other, tidings of his extravagance had even reached Gresham Street, whereat Lady Earnshaw murmured, "Poor boy!" as over a child with necessary measles, and Edith shed bitter tears—not for the loss of the money which might have been hers, but for the way in which it was going.

For some weeks Mr. Greene had seen little or nothing of his friend, being absorbed in his dramatic enterprise. Having got his play read and accepted for the Imperial,—though, as I have said, it was to be played by an out-of-the-season company—he was not a man to let it fail through any neglect on his own part. He was not to get a penny for it—that was understood, to begin with; but he thought himself fortunate that he had not to pay his manageress for bringing it out; for he firmly believed that when it should once have been performed in public, his reputation as a playwright would be secured. He had been so deeply and so long wrapped up in the production of his little drama, that any one in connection with it ceased to have individuality for him, and only formed part of that divine work; otherwise, there was at least one among the "scratch" company, as they were irreverently termed, who would have interested him not a little.

Madame Lucinda, the (interim) manager, would, had his eyes not been engaged on less agreeable objects, have struck him, as she did most people, as a remarkably fine woman. She was young, and tall, and graceful, with better manners than belong to managers, and, having once accepted his play, permitted him to have his own way with it, and, so far as lay in her power, with the players. She was far too great a personage in her own opinion to act in so

slight a thing herself, and reserved her powers for the *piece de resistance*, as Mr. Greene had called it, which had plenty of singing in it. She gave him *carte blanche*, I say, as to his own play, but the *carte blanche* was of the nature of a blank check given by a very generous and impulsive fellow, but who has unhappily no balance at his bankers'. She had little or no authority over her company, which was composed of certain free lances of the stage who had temporarily joined her banner without much hope of gain—and being out of an engagement—chiefly to keep themselves before the public.

Each imagined that he or she would be the cause of the success of the speculation, if it should be a success; and if a failure, that it would be owing to the want of support from their fellows. In theatrical affairs a bundle of "sticks" is *not* necessarily strong, and there were a great many such in Madame Lucinda's company; and to the worst of the sticks, as usual, was allotted the task of playing the first piece.

Poor Mr. Greene went almost out of his mind to see how they mauled "The Suitors" in rehearsal, which at the university, so far as the male characters were concerned at least, had been very fairly rendered. The reason of this was that the comedy was what is called a "gentle" one; and under the roof of the Imperial, as it was at present tenanted, there was no one capable of acting like a gentleman. The performers were also given to "gag"—to interpolate sentiments, and, what was worse, *facetiae* of their own, or to substitute it for what the author would have put in their mouths. And this original matter of theirs was very sad stuff.

Ten times a day poor Mr. Greene made up his mind to "withdraw" his play; but, in the first place, he didn't quite know how to do it, or even whether he *could* do it; and, secondly, he had a faint hope that at the public representation of the piece things would go better. His actors, when imperfect in their parts, would tell him that, though they failed sometimes in rehearsal, they always "came out right" before the curtain, and he devoutly hoped that it might be so; but it was not their want of memory that he feared so much as the powers of their imagination.

"Well, Mr. Greene, is there anything more you want for 'The Suitors'?" inquired Madame Lucinda of him, graciously, the day before the opening night.

"Not so much *more* as less, my dear madam," was his reply. "If the gentlemen would only behave as such—"

"You must not ask impossibilities," she put in, coldly.

"But is the proper use of the letter 'h' an impossibility, madam?"

"It is very difficult with some people—indeed, I have found it so myself," added the lady, demurely.

"I never noticed it, madam," answered the other, with no excess of gallantry; but then his mind was preoccupied. "If these gentry would only drop their bad habits, and *not* their 'h's,' I should feel much happier with respect to 'The Suitors.'"

"It is a nice little play, Mr. Greene, and ought to 'go'; but I can do no more for it—I am afraid I cannot spare you a box."

"Indeed! Not a box for my own play?"

"Well, you see, the *Chatterer* must have the stage-box; that it insists upon, or it will damn us all to a certainty. Then the *Scratcher* must have the next best box; and the *Teaser*, the *Biter*, and the *Squeezer* must all have boxes."

"The Press seems to be a 'little exacting,'" observed Mr. Greene. "But where will you put the *Thunderer*?"

"Oh, the *Thunderer* is too grand to accept boxes! The *Thunderer* always buys a stall for itself, and pays for it in hard cash, which is fortunate, for it will damn us, at all events; it always does damn a new play."

"By jingo, this is pleasant!" observed Mr. Greene.

"It's nothing when you're used to it, my dear sir."

"You can't have been used to it long, madam," said Greene, with a little bow; it was his first gallant speech to his manageress, but he was touched by her pluck and spirit, and, for the first time, took note of how very young, as well as beautiful, she was.

"Not very long," answered she, quietly; "but one lives through a good deal in a short time behind the foot-lights. You can have a stall or two, of course."

"A friend of mine has taken twenty."

"That must be a friend indeed; I hope he will find the people to fill them. This is a very bad time of year for getting an audience, or I should not be the manager of the Imperial."

Mr. Greene admired the frankness of this woman, who, although an actress, ventured to be natural, and showed no symptom of the coquette.

"I wish, Madame Lucinda, you were acting in my play—that is," he added, "I wish that it was worthy of you."

"You are very good," said she, coldly, "but it is not in my line. If there had been a singing chamber-maid in the piece, then I might have thought about it."

He did not quite know whether she was in jest or earnest. She did not look at all like a singing chamber-maid, but much more like a duchess—that is, a stage duchess, which is generally as greatly superior (in appearance) to the real article as the stage gentleman is inferior to his original.

The ladies in his play were pleasant enough, and infinitely superior to the males; but they were of a different genus from this woman; not in talent—for Madame Lucinda was by no means a Mrs. Siddons, and was said to owe more to her face and figure for such reputation as she had gained, than to her vocal or dramatic powers—but in character. He found himself for the first time interested in the pecuniary success of her venture, of which, to say truth, he did not entertain any high expectations. He had seen a rehearsal of the *piece de resistance*, and though it was better acted than his own play, he thought it dull. Its authorship was a secret, but there were uncharitable people who hinted that the author was a certain man of title who paid for its production, for the hire of the theatre, and for more besides. It was possibly true, for the drama has at least as much cause as any other profession, not excepting even "the Church," to thank Heaven we have a "House of Lords."

But however that was, Mr. Greene thought

better of Madame Lucinda that day than he had ever thought to do, and would have thought more about her but for "The Suitors," the impending fate of which naturally claimed his attention. Greene and Talbot were both popular in their respective circles, and could certainly have counted upon any number of young men to witness the production of a new play; only at this time of the year there were no young men, except at Messrs. Lewis & Allenby's, or Messrs. Marshall & Snelgrove's, in town, and these they were not acquainted with.

"There are lots of people of a certain sort," Madame Lucinda had said, with her usual frankness, "who will lend a hand to me and my piece, but that will be only for the first night or two: one cannot look for full houses at this season."

But this had not prepared Mr. Greene for the beggarly account of empty stalls that met his gaze when his friend and he took their places on the eventful night. Talbot had sent out his nineteen tickets to the quarters he had thought most favorable to their acceptance, but only one friend had been able to make use of them; the rest were all gone to the moors, or to the sea, as he would himself have gone but for this supreme occasion, and so there were eighteen vacant places all of a row. The exception was one Sir Stafford Rue, an ancient pillar of the turf, and faithful votary of Pall Mall, who, when asked on one occasion whether he had ever been into the country, was understood to have replied, "Sir, I once went to Brighton, and repented of it."

The other stalls, indeed, had all been taken, but by friends of the manageress, who did not see the necessity of being in time for the farce, and indeed thought it looked better to show Madame Lucinda that they only came to see *her*; so these were empty too. And the boxes, of course, were empty, partly because a piece that "played the people in" was not worthy of the notice of the great dramatic critics, and partly because they wished to give an impression of the fashionable hour at which they dined, and the aristocratic society which they frequented.

The pit and galleries and dress circle were full enough—for you can fill anything with "paper;" but the space between the two friends, who were in a back row, and the stage, occupied only by the presence of the bald old baronet (who had brought a French novel with him to relieve *ennui*, and was reading it), was like a desert in which stands one leafless palm, and depressed poor Mr. Greene exceedingly.

"By jingo," said he, ruefully, "the curtain is going up, and there's nobody here!"

"The gallery is full," answered Dick, encouragingly; and, indeed, the vigor with which the gods were demanding that the play should begin, by shrieks and stamps, was suggestive of many thousands.

"Confound the gallery!" muttered Greene; and then he felt his friend beginning to shake, and tried to think how enjoyable the humor of the situation would have been if anybody else had been the dramatist of the evening.

Presently some ladies came into the stage-box, which made the other boxes look emptier than ever.

"Are those friends of yours, Pussy?" inquired Dick, slyly.

"I don't know yet," was the unexpected reply. "They are the critics attached to the staff of the *Spatterer*."

"Dear me!" said Dick, examining them through his glasses. "Um, ah!"

And Greene felt him beginning to shake again. The curtain rose, and the characters entered to plaudits; they were not numerous, but they were equal in numbers to the occupants of the stage-box, *plus* the baronet, who had closed his French novel, but kept his finger between the leaves, that solace under boredom might be found immediately. It was undoubtedly very depressing.

"I wish the house would take fire!" murmured Mr. Greene, "and the play, and the players, and these few people (who would never be missed) be all burned together."

"What are the pit laughing at? I did not catch it," inquired Dick, presently.

"Of course you didn't. It was those beasts coming into their stalls. They are spoiling all the points."

And certainly points are difficult to catch when doors open and close every moment, and men converse with box-keepers about the numbers of their places, and ladies come in with trailing silk dresses, and express regrets aloud to their friends that they have come too soon, since the first piece is not over yet.

Mr. Greene suffered agonies, while the banging of the doors and the chatter of the incomers deprived an audience of one, if not of any great intellectual treat, of at least some rather neat points and humorous situations. The actors knew their parts, and also a great deal more, which was wormwood to the author. Presently one of them made a joke of his own, the indecorum of which enraptured the gallery; while the ladies in the stalls looked at one another significantly, as much as to say they knew how it would be when they were so foolish as to be in time even for the end of a farce.

"Why, the piece is going like steam!" said Dick, cheerfully. "Only, wasn't that joke of yours just a little broad, Pussy?"

"If I had a revolver I'd shoot him!" was Greene's muttered rejoinder.

Dick thought this referred to his friend the baronet, who had resumed his French novel, so he said nothing.

"Who is that fellow who has just come in?" inquired he, presently—"the man in the centre stall yonder; the actors are all playing at him."

"I suppose it's the critic of the *Thunderer*."

"He's rather late—for a critic—ain't he?"

"And quite right, too," answered Mr. Greene, savagely. "He was a fool to come at all, and so am I. Thank Heaven, we are getting to the end of it!"

And indeed the curtain began to drop, then hitched and stuck half-way, amidst a tempest of applause, in which cries of "Author, author," were occasionally audible.

"You must go on the stage, Pussy; they are calling for you," cried Dick, clapping his hands, and shrieking out, "Author, author," lustier than anybody.

"Be quiet!" cried Greene, irascibly. "They are clapping the carpenter, not me."

But again the calls for "Author, author" grew more clamorous, and presently the box-keeper

touched Greene upon the shoulder, and said, "Come, sir."

To see Mr. Greene upon the stage, pale with rage, and showing his teeth by way of smiling, was a very amusing spectacle, and everybody enjoyed it amazingly. But that astute young gentleman was not deceived by these manifestations of delight, and set them down at their true value; not even when Madame Lucinda met him at the wing as he went out, and said, in her silvery voice, "I congratulate you, Mr. Greene," was he shaken for an instant in his conviction that "The Suitors" was a failure.

"I call it a deuced good play, and very well received," said Dick, heartily, when his friend had once more taken his seat beside him; "I only hope the next will be as good a one. I suppose we must sit it out, mustn't we?"

"I must, at all events, my dear fellow, for Madame Lucinda's sake," was the other's cold reply. For once this agreeable young gentleman was dreadfully out of temper.

"Who is Madame Lucinda?" inquired Dick. "I know nothing of her beyond seeing her name in the play-bills."

"No more do I, except that she is a very beautiful woman."

"She has got a husband, I suppose, since she calls herself 'madame'?"

"One, at least, I should imagine."

Then the men who had gone out between the pieces for a breath of fresh air, with the smoke of a cigarette in it, took their places again, while the orchestra finished its last notes.

"What is this play?" inquired Dick, with a great yawn. He did not care for the theatre, and only liked the opera for the ballet.

"It's called the 'Mad Physician,' and it's very dull."

"I have no doubt of it. If I don't sit it out, and as you must, it seems, just look in at my rooms when it's over, will you, old fellow? Otherwise I shall not see you for a month and more. I go to Scotland, you know, to-morrow."

"Yes; you only remained in town for this infernal play of mine."

"Don't mention it, Pussy; I'm deuced glad to have done it. But I think I'll only wait for the first act of this one. Who is this lady? [consulting the play-bill]. Ah, the Physician's maid-servant. Well, she's not so bad; not so bad, I mean, as *your* second young woman. It must be dreadful to be so plain, while your lover is calling you so beautiful on the stage. Is this Madame Lucinda?"

"No, no; *she* is the Physician's daughter; well worth looking at, I can tell you; but as for her acting— But here she comes, so that you may judge for yourself."

The doors in the centre of the scene had been thrown back, and the opening was now filled by a girlish figure, gracefully attired, but owing far more to her native beauty than to external attractions. She was very young, yet of fine proportions, and had a marvellous air of confidence and self-command. She courtesied once in reply to the roar of homage, and slowly came down the stage. Her walk (which so few of her sex can compass on the boards) was perfect; it had neither swing nor trip in it. Nut-brown hair, confined by a single ribbon, flowed down her back in a broad, shining stream; her hazel eyes, even

in the glare of the gas, wore a gentle and tender expression; the smile alone, which her part demanded of her at the moment, looked somewhat forced and artificial: all else was nature's self.

"Does she not make up well, Dick, as an *ingénue*?" said Greene, admiringly.

Dick did not answer. His every sense seemed fixed upon the stage; his eyes, his ears, his very being had concentrated themselves upon this charming figure.

"The lady has 'fetched' him!" muttered Greene. "I thought he was too old a stager, by this time, to be so hard hit, though I am bound to say I never saw her look so well. He will be disenchanted with her acting, however."

"What are you at, Dick?"

He might well ask, for his friend had risen from his seat, and was looking beyond the five rows of stalls in front of him as a boy looks over the gate of an apple-orchard; if he saw them at all, it was merely as obstacles to be clambered over.

"Sit down, Dick! Are you mad?"

"I must see her, I must speak to her!" answered his companion in a hoarse whisper, which fortunately did not extend beyond his friend's ears. "It is my darling; it is Lucy Lindon!"

CHAPTER XL.

A LITTLE SUPPER PARTY.

THE incident that had happened in the stalls of the Imperial was much more "dramatic," as Mr. Greene confessed to himself, than any which had taken place that night upon its stage. Even the fate of "The Suitors" sunk into insignificance in his eyes compared with the catastrophe which had befallen his friend. For Mr. Greene, though he made no pretense of being anything that is conventionally termed "good," had a loyal heart, and was (for a man) unselfish. I dare not say more in his favor, for the days when it was permissible to speak favorably of "the Gentiles who have not the law" are passed; now "principle is first," as poor Dick would have said, in his racing jargon, "and practice nowhere." Still, it was "nice" of Pussy to lead his friend out of the theatre, at the risk, nay, with the certainty, of incurring the displeasure of his manageress, for putting such a slight upon her, and to walk him up and down the street outside, like a restive colt.

"I must see her! I must see her!" Dick kept on repeating, like a monomaniac with his one melancholy note; and Greene answered, soothingly, "And so you shall," in a tone such as we use to a spoiled child; "of course you shall, my dear fellow, but not to-night. You can't interrupt the play to talk to her, though I have no doubt what you would have to say to one another would be much better than the dialogue of the author; the audience wouldn't stand it. And after the play she receives all her theatrical friends—myself among the number—to supper at her own house. You know from my own case" (and Mr. Greene smiled bitterly at the remembrance of that mischance of his at Masham Manor) "how foolish it is to mix up one's love affairs with those of the drama. You can't

come out to Kilburn after midnight, and, amidst the popping of champagne corks, pop—"

"She lives at Kilburn, does she?" interrupted Dick, greedily. "I know nothing about her now, you know," he added, piteously, "not even that."

"Just so—and perhaps you had better not know." Mr. Greene's tone was very grave.

"It's a lie!" cried Dick, beating his hand upon his thigh. "I wouldn't believe it on your oath."

"I have stated nothing to the lady's disadvantage, my dear fellow," was the quiet rejoinder. "Let us wait for the affidavits to be put in before we answer them."

"I don't care what they say when they are put in," answered the other, passionately.

"My poor Dick, you are off your head to-night: it is useless to talk to you."

"Where does she live? The street, I mean, in Kilburn, and the number?" He had pulled out his betting-book, as constant a companion as ever Bible was to Covenanter, and was holding its little pencil in his shaking fingers.

"I don't know," said Greene, plumply; "I forget. She's going to take me with her in her brougham. Don't be jealous, for another lady will be with us. Even if there was room for you—which there isn't—you couldn't say all you wish to Madame Lucinda before another lady."

This was certainly true, and Talbot's face acknowledged it. Greene saw that he was yielding, and pressed his point.

"Your seeing her to-night is out of the question; but I will speak to her—sound her on certain matters which it is certainly indispensable for you to know—and I'll let you know about them by letter. You will be at Dunkeld."

"I shall be in Pall Mall; I shall not move from London." Dick's voice, generally so flexible and buoyant, was as hard as iron.

"Very good," said Greene. "I will come and breakfast with you to-morrow morning, and tell you all about it."

"Won't you come to-night—I mean, after supper?" he pleaded. "I shall not go to bed till I see you."

"If you are so very serious, then, of course, I will come."

"You are a real friend, Pussy. You are true—" He wished to say more, but could not; so only grasped the other's hand.

"I believe I am 'indifferent honest,' at all events, old fellow," answered Greene, deprecatingly; "but that has its disadvantages. When I do come, I shall tell you the truth."

"No matter. I don't care what the truth may be. I mean to marry Lucy."

"But suppose she is married already, Dick! and upon my life I think it is so."

"Then—then I shall go to the devil all the quicker."

And he ran down the street as if he were already on the road.

Mr. Greene was seldom astonished, but on this occasion he did experience a certain sensation of surprise.

"I did not think it was in poor Dick," he murmured, "to feel so strongly. I thought *calf-love* was vague and wandering, and would never run a-muck. He will go quicker to the devil without her, he thinks, as if a pair did not

go faster than one horse! This shall never be, if I can help it. I shall surely be able to 'spot' one of her husbands." And then he went back into the theatre to give his support to Madame Lucinda in the play, for he had his duty to his manageress to perform as well as his duty to his friend.

The curtain fell amidst bouquets and plaudits—as it always does on a first night—but "those who knew" knew the play was doomed. It was better acted than "The Suitors" had been, but it was inordinately dull; the heroine had done her best, but she had been ill supported, and even of her Sir Stafford Rue remarked that he would "rather have seen her on the trapeze."

Greene was glad that Dick was not at hand when this observation was made, but it somehow seemed to strengthen his determination to "disillusion" his friend, no matter at what cost to his feelings.

"But has she ever distinguished herself on the bars?" he inquired.

"Certainly," answered Sir Stafford, promptly. "She comes from the music-halls; did the swinging business at the Hyperion—was shot from a spring-board sixty feet into the air at the Verulam—and was eventually discovered to possess dramatic talents."

"But, surely, her forte is singing."

"Very likely: she led the virgin chorus in the nunnery of St. Etienne, in Paris, and ran off with the choir-master."

"And did she marry him?"

"Over a fiddlestick, perhaps! Married, begad!"

The old gentleman shuffled into his brougham with a snort of contempt.

Greene was sagacious enough to see that this nunnery story had its origin in Lucy's engagement at St. Ethelburga's; and the probability was that the rest of the baronet's information was, to a great extent, hypothetical. But such as it was, it did not impress him favorably with Madame Lucinda's antecedents.

He did not go behind the scenes to congratulate the manageress upon her success—which is always done by one's theatrical friends after a first appearance, even if it has been received with cabbage-stalks and orange-peel—but waited for her at the stage door.

Presently she came out, welcomed him with a pleasant smile, and beckoned him into her carriage, in which a lady friend was already seated. This was Mrs. Eldridge, a staid, middle-aged personage, in gray silk, who accompanied her everywhere, and was said to have been a walking gentlewoman on the stage of old Drury, who had failed in that unambitious line of business—which seemed probable. That she had nothing to say for herself of course did not prove the fact; language had never been expected of her; but she always looked ill at ease, nervous, and in some apprehension of her youthful charge.

"And what did you think of the Physician's daughter, Mr. Greene?" asked Madame Lucinda.

"I thought she was all she ought to be; but I cannot say as much of the play itself."

"Ah," replied the lady, showing two beautiful rows of teeth, though not in anger, "that is what everybody tells me. They have nothing, however, to find fault with in 'The Suitors.'"

"Then I am afraid 'everybody' was very lenient. I confess I think it was very ill acted."

"That is what authors always say of their plays," laughed Madame Lucinda. "There was, indeed, a hitch or two, no doubt; but your piece will 'go' in time, and very smoothly. We were all waiting for you behind the curtain, with our congratulations."

"I should have been there, as in duty bound, but for an accident. The friend who sat with me in the stalls was indisposed—"

"Overcome with the heat, no doubt," put in Madame Lucinda, quickly, yet with an indifferent air. "It was certainly very warm."

Mr. Greene could not be sure, from her manner, whether she had recognized Talbot or not.

"We have only a small party at supper to-night," she went on—"Mr. Duplex, the dramatist, and a few professional friends. You know Duplex."

Of course Mr. Greene knew Duplex, which no one acquainted with theatrical affairs could well avoid: a little painted gentleman, with a brown wig and a judicial manner, who had been professionally "connected with the stage" from a period at which other boys are performing "The Miller and his Men" with pasteboard puppets, and who, the legend ran, had been on speaking terms with Jack Bannister.

"Your play is a very good one for a first play," he had observed, with closed eyes and oracular tone, on his first introduction to Mr. Greene, and that gentleman detested him accordingly.

Knyvett Place, Kilburn, is one of those pleasant, but quite out-of-the-way little "places," which, like many others in the same locality, the passer-by would never notice unless his attention was especially called to it. It stands back behind Knyvett Terrace, and is approached through a gap in it, with iron gates of diminutive size, and by a miniature avenue of trees similar to those which represent the foliage in a Noah's Ark—a place that, to the eye of a country novel-reader, would suggest an abode of "guilty splendor," where Vice might revel secure from the public eye, but where, as a matter of fact, head-clerks in City houses mostly lived, and believed themselves to be out of town on the strength of a few square feet of garden ground.

The gate-way just admitted the little brougham, and that was all; if Vice had come lolling in his chariot, as usually depicted, he would have had to get out and walk up that last twenty feet of road with every eye upon his coronet. Nor did the dwelling of Madame Lucinda herself betray any signs of naughtiness. It was prettily but by no means expensively furnished; indeed, its most striking ornaments were flowers, which at that season of the year could be procured at trifling cost: there was a well-stocked flower-box in every window; on the little landing on the stairs were flowers; and out of the bijou drawing-room you looked into a tiny conservatory, into which you could not step for the flowers which filled it from roof to threshold. If the hostess had no genuine country tastes, she had at least the grace to affect them; and, what ought to have carried conviction of her innocence to every heart, was the absence of champagne at supper.

For whoever heard of a *bonâ fide* case of "guilty splendor" without champagne? Even Mr. Duplex, to whom Greene spoke quite confi-

dentially upon this subject, preferring his friend's interests even to his sense of propriety as a guest, admitted that much; "Though, mind you," he added, frankly, "I wish there *was* champagne. I call this wishy-washy claret-cup the merest affectation of virtue."

"But do you think our hostess does affect it?"

"Certainly. All women affect it—even those who have really got it. It is a case where they think surplusage is no error. If you ask me whether I believe Madame Lucinda to be a Lucretia, that is another matter—I can't tell you. She *may* be. On the other hand, she may be a Lucretia Borgia. Bless your soul, I know nothing about her!"

"Nothing about her?"

"No more than you do, at least. I know she has been in queer companies—I mean dramatic companies—and is striving to make her way to better things. I honor her for it, and shall presently propose her health, a thing I never did before on any similar occasion except in champagne."

It was evident that Mr. Duplex attached great significance to the absence of the missing liquor; it was also clear that nothing was to be got out of him respecting Madame Lucinda. Perhaps he really knew nothing. His being at her house that night was as natural a thing as to meet the bishop at luncheon at one's rector's after a confirmation or other ceremonial; it suggested scarcely any previous acquaintanceship; it was an official act. Mr. Duplex was a common theatrical godfather, who came to the christening (supper) of every new play.

Mrs. Marmot and Miss Barnes, also present, might be said to be the midwives. They were very literally "old stagers;" and though they had long retired from the theatrical profession, took an absorbing interest in such interesting events. They attended at the birth of every infant drama, and very often had to assist, as in the present case, at its obsequies. They were very good-natured, kindly women, but vain beyond all that Solomon himself ever imagined possible in the way of vanity. Each of them asked Mr. Greene whether he remembered her at "The Lane" (they meant Drury Lane), and I blush to say that he answered each in the affirmative. He felt confident that they would tell him all about themselves, and prevent him from betraying his ignorance; and they did so. He learned for the first time that the success of "Romeo and Juliet" depends solely upon the manner in which Juliet's nurse is acted, and that of "Othello" upon the performance of Iago's wife.

Besides these ladies, there was the second female character in "The Mad Physician" and the first in Mr. Greene's own piece. They were young and fairly pretty, and would doubtless have received his best attentions, had not his mind been preoccupied with his hostess, scarce a word or a look from whom escaped him. He blushed to find himself at once a guest and a detective, but he felt his duty to his friend was paramount. What shamed him more was that Madame Lucinda's behavior was all that it should be—quiet, natural, and, notwithstanding the failure of her little enterprise, serene.

There was only one gentleman present beside himself and Mr. Duplex—a Mr. Herbert Thorne, whom he soon discovered, by his eulogies on that

unfortunate drama, to be the author of "The Mad Physician."

It was evident that he was the lion of the entertainment, and, if what Mr. Duplex hinted was correct, for an excellent reason—he was the man that was going to pay for it.

"Pays for everything, my good sir; and quite right, too, for he's got heaps of money. He will bring out another play or two, which will be damned, like this, and then he will take a theatre all to himself, which will be the ruin of him."

After which biographical sketch of his future career, Mr. Greene heard him assure Mr. Thorne that "With a little careful pruning, sir, that play will leave nothing to be desired."

The author shook his head; he thought there was nothing to be desired as it stood.

It was of Mr. Thorne that Mr. Greene had his suspicions, since he could scarcely entertain them of anybody else. He was young and rather good-looking, and, though full of conceit and self-importance, condescended to pay Madame Lucinda many compliments, which she received as though they had been her daily bread. He was evidently an *habitué* of the house, for he inquired after her chickens.

"Chickens!" ejaculated Mr. Duplex, who, never having seen chickens on the stage, could not imagine any one having an interest in such things.

"They are Mrs. Eldridge's pets," explained the hostess. "She has lived in the country all her life, and can't get on without them."

Mrs. Eldridge nodded assent, looking at the same time so extremely frightened, that Mr. Duplex whispered, "I believe she stole 'em."

He had drunk a great deal of the claret-cup by that time, and it was by no means so wishy-washy as he had described it to be.

Presently he made his speech, as he had threatened, in honor of their hostess, and, to Mr. Greene's amazement, Mr. Thorne acknowledged it. There had been, it was true, some casual mention of "The Physician's Daughter" in the course of it, and it was just possible that the author had thought that sufficient ground for getting on his legs; but, certainly, coupled with his personal acquaintance with the chickens, it did look suspicious.

"Why the deuce," thought Mr. Greene, "should he return thanks for Madame Lucinda?"

Soon afterward the party broke up, and everybody rose to go except Mr. Thorne. "Perhaps he is not going at all; perhaps he lives here, perhaps (oh, joy!)," thought Mr. Greene, "he is Mr. Lucinda."

It was quite possible that his hostess might have married this man, and yet retained the name by which she was known upon the stage; and in that case Dick would be secure from any serious entanglement. He made up his mind, however, not to give up his point of staying to the last until he should be turned out of the place, in order to discover this for certain. Mr. Lucinda, if such he were, would scarcely go through the farce of leaving him in the house, and then returning to it after his departure.

Mr. Greene had already suffered much, and had even done wrong to his own conscience for the sake of his friend; but when the other guests had taken their departure, he found a worse ordeal than all that had yet taken place awaiting

him. Mr. Thorne wished to ask Madame Lucinda's opinion regarding certain points in "The Mad Physician," and this involved quotation—and Mr. Greene's listening to it. The man had an infamous delivery:

"The chariot wheels jarred in the gates
Through which he drove them forth."

And the chariot, besides, was not worth driving.

"I am afraid I weary you, Mr. Greene," observed the author, after half an hour of this. His tone was not, however, apologetic; it seemed to say, "But you have only to go to bed."

"You weary me very much," said Greene, frankly. (How these two young dramatists hated one another!) "But I have got a few remarks to make to Madame Lucinda before I go respecting my own piece."

"Oh dear!" said Mr. Thorne, "I did not know that I was delaying business of such great importance;" and, after a few more quotations, he took himself off.

Greene noticed, not for the first time, that his hostess wore a wedding-ring. It signified little, of course; it might be only "fifteen shillings' worth of respectability;" still, it gave him hopes that though she was probably not married to this man, she might have been married to somebody else—no matter who, so long as he was alive.

"You wish to speak to me about 'The Snit-ors,'" said she, quietly, when he was left alone with her and Mrs. Eldridge.

"My dear madam, I confess that I do not; that was a mere subterfuge to get rid of Mr. Thorne; but I have something of importance to say to you—of a private nature."

And he glanced at the "walking gentlewoman" as though he would like to see her walk.

"I have no secrets from Mrs. Eldridge," observed Madame Lucinda, dryly, and with a certain severity.

"She thinks I am going to make love to her on her own account," thought Mr. Greene, "and, what is worse, she doesn't like it." There was no alternative but to tell his tale in the presence of a third person.

"There was with me in the theatre to-night, madam, an old friend of mine—and yours—one Richard Talbot."

Madame Lucinda did not move a muscle.

"Talbot, Talbot," she said; "the name sounds familiar to me."

"Why, Lucy," cried Mrs. Eldridge, starting to her feet, "it's Master Dick, from Durnton!"

"Of course it is, mother," answered Lucy, calmly; "I saw him in the stalls to-night. Well, sir, yes, I know him."

CHAPTER XLI.

"I WILL NOT SEEK RICHARD OUT."

WITH that "Yes, I know him," of Madame Lucinda's, a strange change came over her face. It was calm and quiet enough, and her eyes regarded Mr. Greene with steady composure; but he felt that under that mask of gentleness, and grace, and beauty there was a sharp pain; only a quiver of the nostril and a tightening of the lip betrayed it, and only a kind heart would have

perceived it. But Mr. Greene's heart was very kind.

"I have come here to-night, madam, as Richard Talbot's friend," said he, gently, "upon a very difficult errand."

"Let us say 'delicate,' Mr. Greene," put in his hostess, quickly; "your difficulty lies in your regard for my feelings. Do not spare them, and then your task will be easy. Speak to me," she went on, in bitter scorn, "as to a low-born woman who once attempted, and failed, to induce a young gentleman of fortune and position to marry her, and who afterward became an adventuress upon the stage. What need is there of circumlocution in such a case?"

The humility of her words contrasted strangely with the haughtiness of her tone and carriage; it was as though a penitent, instead of with sheet and taper, should make her confession in royal robes.

"You came here," she continued, "to see me at my worst, and to report upon it. I do not say," she added, for the color had rushed into the cheeks of her young guest, "that you did it willingly. The part of a spy is not suited to your character, Mr. Greene, and you play it ill."

"Let me relieve you from your embarrassment," she went on, in gentler tones. "I will tell you my story without putting you to the pain—for you are a gentleman—of cross-examination. You may not believe me, but any inquiries you may think it worth your while to make will corroborate me in every particular: Mrs. Eldridge here is my mother. I have lived with her ever since I left Aunt Susan's roof. My life has been as free from taint—though not, perhaps, from temptation—as that of your own sister, or of her mother before her."

"I believe it!" cried Mr. Greene, with sudden impulse; he could not help it. Her words, her looks, her tone, carried conviction with them; and he was too generous not to acknowledge it.

"I thank you," answered she, gravely, "and the more so because I know you wished to have found it otherwise."

Poor Mr. Greene grew purple under her keen eyes. "Indeed, madam, you do me wrong," he stammered.

"I do not, sir. What you hoped to have to say to your friend was this: 'The girl that you went mad about when you were a boy has become an abandoned woman—wanton, mercenary, vile. To have married her in the old days would have been humiliation; but to do so now would be irredeemable disgrace and ruin.'"

Mr. Greene felt that he was being beaten all along the line, and that unless he was content to fail most utterly in his embassy, he must abandon the plan he had marked out for himself. It was necessary to change front in the face of the enemy.

"You speak of Talbot's ruin, madam," said he, "as though it were an event dependent upon a contingency; I am afraid it is a certainty. I am not quite sure, even, that it has not already happened."

"I have heard something of this," said Madame Lucinda, sighing: "that Richard was very wild and extravagant I guessed, nay, knew."

"Extravagant is no word for his conduct, madam. In these last six months he has dissipated a fortune. Before the year is out he may

have spent his all. If I possessed the sister of whom you have spoken, I would as soon see her married to a beggar as to Richard Talbot. No hand can hold him, no tongue can warn him; he is a born spendthrift."

"Poor Richard!" said she, gently.

"Dear Master Dick was always lavish, you know, Lucy," put in Mrs. Eldridge. "He never could say 'No.'"

"He was always generous," she answered, quietly, "too generous; and thoughtless for himself, and too easily led by others."

"You have read his character well," said Mr. Greene, who flattered himself that matters were taking a good turn; "he has a good heart, but is a mere creature of impulse. It would be easy to show that to become his wife would be a misfortune to any woman; but in your case I appeal to no motives of self-interest. I would rather point out to you that when the crash comes—as come it will—and Talbot is penniless, it would be an ill service to him on your part to have married him; for such an alliance, since you bade me speak plainly, must needs alienate his friends, and deprive him of such assistance as might be even then in their power to render him."

"I see: they would let him starve in company, but not alone. Well, perhaps it would not be necessary to appeal to their tender mercies."

She threw a glance around the dainty little room, which the other interpreted at once.

"I entreat you not to think of that," he pleaded. "You only know him as what he was; you do not understand what has become his second nature. All that is here, and which you are proposing to yourself to give him, would be a mere drop in the ocean of his expenditure. The little hoard which, if I am right, your hard work and prudence have acquired, and which is threatened even now by the misfortune of to-night, would not supply his extravagances for a week. He would bitterly regret having beggared you, as well as himself, but he would do it. You might as well hope for moderation in the drunkard. I am ashamed to speak such words of my friend, but it is the truth."

"Poor Richard! poor Richard!" sighed she again, and this time the tears were in her lustrous eyes. It was plain she really loved him. Mr. Greene perceived the extremity of the danger, and became audacious.

"Yes, 'poor' you may well call him, for it is but anticipating matters, and that only by a month or two; and he is not only poor, but proud. If you have any notion of supporting him, when the worst has happened to him, by your dramatic talents" (he was right—she *had*; for the second time the color came into her cheeks, and told him her thought was read), "you may dismiss it at once; that generous impulse can never bear fruit. Richard Talbot would never stoop to be dependent on his wife's exertions, and, least of all, permit her to act upon the stage."

"You think so," said she, quietly.

"I am positively certain of it," said Mr. Greene. He was not at all certain of it, but he contrived to look so.

"I think the gentleman speaks very sensibly, Lucy," observed Mrs. Eldridge. "Think of Master Richard—and him a Talbot—living on

your salary at Narcissus Hall, or those sort of places! It would almost make the old squire turn in his grave."

"I care nothing about the old squire," answered Lucy, fiercely. "Had it not been for him—" Here she stopped herself, though with a visible effort; then added, abruptly, "I only care for Richard."

"In that case, my dear madam," put in Mr. Greene, "I am sure you will do what you can to discourage him, should he renew his attentions to you. To act otherwise would be to do him no real kindness, and yourself an irreparable injury."

"I shall not seek Richard out," answered she, calmly. "I shall lay no snares for him such as his friends may have pictured: if I had had the will to win him, I could have done so long ago, in spite of them, without the aid of artifice. But if he comes to me as in the old days, I will not pass my word, as I did once, to refuse to see him." She hesitated a moment, then added, abruptly, "That is the best—or the worst—that I can say to you at present respecting this matter, Mr. Greene."

"It is, at all events, more than I had any right to ask," answered the young fellow, frankly. "I am deeply obliged to you for the confidence you have extended to me, and for the patience with which you have met what may well have seemed an impertinent appeal."

He rose and bade her farewell. The dawn was already streaming into the room as he did so, and he could not help noticing how fresh and radiant she looked, despite its searching beams: how different from most women under such circumstances; how very different from what might have been expected in her case. His surprise at her mere physical appearance was, however, slight indeed compared with that evoked in him by her character. "She may have been acting from first to last," he murmured to himself as he walked up the little avenue; "but if so, she should be at the head of her profession."

"Well, mother, he is gone at last, and it is time for bed," said Lucy, kissing her.

"Time indeed, my dear," answered Mrs. Parkes, with a sigh; "at Durnton it would have been almost time for us to be getting up."

"We have changed all that, dear," returned the other, with a tenderness in her tone that had hitherto been lacking, "and I hope not for the worse."

"No, dear, no; I am sure I ought not to complain."

"Yet something troubles you, mother; what is it?"

"Nothing, darling. I was only thinking what a nice young man that Mr. Greene is."

Lucy smiled. "Yes, he is nice, and honest, too, which is a rarer quality. But what is that to us?"

"Nothing. I wish it was; I wish—"

"What do you wish? You have only to ask if I can grant it you."

"Well—you won't be cross with me, my darling; I know it's no use, but I wish you had set your heart on Mr. Greene instead of Master Richard."

A bird was singing at the open window, but *his song was not more fresh, and blithe, and joyous than Lucy's answering laugh.* She kissed *her mother again, and ran up-stairs.*

"Ah," murmured Mrs. Parkes, "she loves him still. I have not heard her laugh like that for many a day. How can she be so foolish? I was just the same with Robert—till I became his wife. What fools we women are!"

CHAPTER XLII.

DICK IS RESOLVED.

SINCE the disreputable lives of so many young gentlemen are accounted for on the ground of their having been crossed in love in (legal) infancy, one is compelled to believe that the plea has something in it; that their inability to secure the object of their desires does, in some sort, warp the thread of their lives. But, in such cases, it is to be observed that the "object" is always a "desirable one;" not by any means the daughter of the young gentleman's father's game-keeper, for example, but some young person of position and property. I am afraid, therefore, that Mr. Richard Talbot's riotous living is to be excused on no such ground. Perhaps he would have been just as wild and extravagant if he had had his way from the first. Yet it is certain that, after his fashion, he was deeply—or, at all events, passionately—attached to Lucy London. She had made a deeper impression on his heart than any other woman whom he had since met; it may be said, indeed, that his choice in that way had been limited—at least, as to quality; but then his heart, though it was susceptible enough, had been touched by no other woman at all. Fool as he was, looked at from a business point of view, he was not so weak as even men of business sometimes are, in taking for affection what was only the promptings of self-interest. He had a very shrewd suspicion that both "lover and friend" would alike "stand afar off" from him when he had come to the end of his capital; perhaps he made exceptions in favor of Aunt Edith and Leonard Greene; but his view of life—thanks, very likely, to the sentiments he heard expressed by his turf acquaintances—was, for such "a frolicsome blade," little short of cynical. His accounts, which, as I have said, he scrupulously kept, informed him that he was on the high-road to ruin; and though, of course, he still looked forward to reconquer himself by a lucky investment on the race-course—for "Hang it all! one can't always lose, you know"—he had a strong presentiment that he should pursue that road to its terminus. "It is better to be born lucky than rich," was an aphorism that was frequently on his lips, and it is a very true aphorism, if this rider be appended to it, "if one intends to live by betting." "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," was another saw, which, though he never uttered it, he might have taken for his motto, since, with the trifling alteration, "for to-morrow we may have nothing to live upon," it had become his rule of life.

Then suddenly, in the midst of this desperate career, he had seen once again this woman who loved him.

The usual metaphor under such circumstances, of one in the desert who comes upon a cooling spring, would not have suited him. He was by no means in a desert; he was rather like some traveller who, in the tropical forest, amidst the most

luscious and luxuriant vegetation, finds his sated eye resting on a home scene—a field, a farm, a flower—such as he knew in distant England. Lucy seemed a link, too, with his better life; strange to say, even with the father who had forbidden him to wed her. The very sight of her had brought his boyhood back to him, with its natural impulses and simple pleasures. He had never been so happy, never, as in that moment when he had plighted troth to her in that old Durnton ruin; and though he had idealized that scene, herself included, he knew her to be thrice as beautiful to-day as she was then. Beauty, as has been sagely said, is but skin-deep; but then so many other things in so many people are of the same depth, such as faith, opinions, honesty, and good-temper; and such as it is, barring paint and powder, it is at least genuine. I am inclined to think, notwithstanding all that has been said, and with the best of motives, in its depreciation, that beauty is the most attractive thing—while it lasts—that human nature possesses.

"If she loves me, if she only still loves me!" murmured Dick to himself over a cigar, as he walked home from the theatre—a somewhat euphemistic phrase, since what he really meant was, "If she has only not taken up with somebody else!" For was it likely she should have retained her affection for him all these years, and never reposed it elsewhere, when the tie between them had been sundered by consent on both sides? Why should she not have met one to love her, and whose love she might return? Among the few good attributes still belonging to him, Dick possessed a sense of justice, and he felt that he had no right to blame his Lucy even if she had married another man. This did not, however, prevent him from hoping she hadn't. He had no one's prejudices to consider now; and if he found her free, and she was willing, he would, without doubt, make her his wife.

These were the thoughts that filled his mind that night, and in the early morning after his visit to the Imperial. He made no attempt to go to bed—indeed, it was not his custom so to do until after several of the small hours—but passed the time walking up and down his sitting-room, and consuming immense cigars. He knew that Greene made a practice of retiring to rest comparatively early; but he had such a confidence in his friendship—or, as he expressed it to himself, felt that he was "such a real good fellow"—that he had no doubt of his looking in, on his way from Knyvett Place.

Nor was he disappointed. After the distant thunder of the country carts, which even on Sunday makes itself audible, had passed away, and a little before the clatter of the milk-pails commenced, Mr. Greene arrived.

"Look here, old fellow, you will have some soda-and-brandy?" were Dick's first words. Though he had been expecting him with such eagerness, he was positively afraid to hear what he might have to say, and wished to delay his revelations.

"Thank you, yes, I will," said Mr. Greene; "for the fact is, we had claret-cnp for supper. There was no champagne."

This delicate attempt at reassurance was utterly thrown away upon his host, to whom such social straws did not show which way the wind blew.

"Then perhaps you'd like some now," he answered, simply; "only there's no ice."

"No, no; I want nothing except to go to bed. Only, of course, I have come to tell you first about Madame Lucinda."

"She is married, then," moaned Dick, looking the picture of woe. "Oh, Pussy, are you sure she is *really* married?"

"I don't think she is married at all."

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculated Dick, helping himself to his friend's soda-and-brandy, for he needed it.

"Well, I don't know about *that*," replied Greene, doubtfully. "I am by no means certain of its being a providential circumstance. I have found out nothing to the lady's personal discredit, but she has played at the Mirable, and all sorts of queer places; and she knows, I should say, some queerish people."

"So do I," said Dick, cheerfully, "and so do you, for that matter."

"Thank you," said Mr. Greene: "speak for yourself. The exigencies of my profession may bring me into contact—"

"Confound your profession!" interrupted Dick. "I want to hear all about Lucy."

"All about her, my dear fellow! I can't tell you; and perhaps if I could, you wouldn't thank me. From what I have seen of her, I am sorry—I mean, I am bound to say, that I believe her to be an honest woman. Mrs. Eldridge, you see, her chaperone, is her mother."

"Stuff and nonsense!" Annie Parkes is her mother."

"Then she has two mothers. That puts a stop to this unfortunate affair. No man could marry with the prospect of two mothers-in-law! It would be suicidal mania."

"No, no, I understand; her mother takes care of her under an assumed name—a gentle, washed-out-looking woman, who looks afraid of her life."

"That is certainly an accurate portrait; though, as respects her daughter, I don't think the last is a good sign."

"Her husband—poor George!—used to beat her," explained Dick; "that has made her nervous." ("This is a nice family!" murmured Mr. Greene.) "But, bless you! she's a most excellent soul," continued Dick. "She was my foster-mother."

"Then you can't marry her daughter," said Mr. Greene, derisively. "It's within the prohibited degrees; perhaps you have never read the table of affinity."

"Never," replied Dick, contemptuously, "and I don't intend to read 'em. Were there any—any men at the supper?"

"Of course there were: lots—at least three. Two of them admired the young lady very much: as to that being the case with me I am certain, and as to the other, I had great difficulty to sit him out."

"To sit him *out*!" echoed Dick, indignantly; "what! at three o'clock in the morning?"

"Well, it was at least that; I should say nearer four. These theatrical people are very queer, my dear fellow, I do assure you."

Dick mixed a glass of soda-and-brandy for himself (very strong), and frowned.

"I had a long talk with Madame Lucinda, who was very frank with me. She is very dif-

ferent from what she was when you knew her, I can tell you. If you fancy, for one thing, that she is ready to throw herself into your arms, as formerly—"

"She never was," interrupted Dick, sharply.

"Then I have been misinformed," was his friend's cool rejoinder. "However, your relations are not now what they used to be—I mean, of course, your relations to *her*. If you imagine yourself to be a great 'catch' to her in a matrimonial point of view, you are quite mistaken. She supports herself very comfortably by her own talents, to begin with; and secondly, though not what is called 'in society,' she has heard something of your goings on."

For the second time in his life—I have to record this incident in the biography of Mr. Richard Talbot—he blushed.

"Oh yes; she knows all about you; very likely, even the details. But, at all events, she is possessed of the very important fact that you are a spendthrift."

"What a fool, what an idiot, I have been!" groaned Dick, bringing his fist down upon the table.

"Of course you have: let us try to keep it in the past tense. You are now hoping to crown the edifice of your folly with a veritable cap and bells by marrying a play-actress."

"I am not!" answered Dick, vehemently.

"I am going to do the only sensible thing I ever did in my life."

"What is that?" inquired Mr. Greene, with an air of curiosity. "I should like to see it."

"So you shall. You shall be my 'best man' at the wedding."

"You are counting your chickens, Master Dick—or at least, if not quite that, you are decidedly premature. It takes two fools to make such a marriage as you are proposing to yourself, and I give this lady some credit for good sense. You must forgive my plain-speaking, old fellow."

"I do, old friend. It runs off me like water from a duck's back. I know you mean nothing but good to me. I shall feel that, whatever happens. Next to Lucy—and Aunt Edie—I can't desert Aunt Edie, though she has given me up—I like you, Pussy."

"And I like *you*, Dick, though you don't deserve it. I am sorry to hear, however, that your aunt Edith has given you up."

"Well, Father Vane has informed her, it seems, that I am delivered over unto Satan; and perhaps I am."

"He ought to know," said Mr. Greene, sarcastically (he did not like any one to abuse his friend except himself). "But it appears to me that you are delivering *yourself* over to that personage. Do you really mean to tell me that if she is weak enough to have you, you are resolved to marry this woman?"

"Most certainly. To-morrow, if possible; if not, on the first lawful day."

"Then I have nothing more to say," sighed Mr. Greene, and went his way.

It is not only the wise who can be determined; and he well knew that his friend could be as resolute as Solomon (who had a weakness, by-the-by, for more than one Lucy) when he had once *made up his mind*.

CHAPTER XLIII.

"IF I COULD SEE MY WAY."

THERE is a general notion among us that a sustained effort on behalf of any good end is not to be expected save from those who have some clearly defined lines of faith, or, at all events, some leading principles of action; and, on the whole, it is a correct one. We do not, as a rule, find impulsive persons, given to no serious thoughts, to be depended on in any protracted struggle on the side of either justice or benevolence, however much they may sympathize with those virtues. And it is the same with their social relations; they will open their purses to a friend, if that sort of aid be necessary, with a readiness which I am afraid is sometimes wanting in individuals of better principle; but they cannot stand any continuous strain upon their sympathies. Like the French infantry, they charge with enthusiasm, but if they meet with discouragement—unexpected obstacles, or even a cold acknowledgment of their services—their alliance ceases to be valuable; they cannot stand the trenches; labor, trouble, are hateful to them. If they miss the object they have aimed at for their friend's sake at the first shot, their good intentions evaporate.

This would probably have been the course of conduct to be expected by his acquaintances of Mr. Leonard Greene: they thought that he was even as one of themselves, because he had certain qualities, such as lightness of heart and good-nature, in common with them; but those who knew him best would, I think, have looked to him for better things; for, as Dick would have said, there were both speed and bottom in him. If that compliment seems too high, let me remark, at least, that just as a selfish man will now and then unexpectedly slough, as it were, his natural skin, and make quite a sacrifice of himself, so the man of impulse will now and then go right through with a business he has once begun, and with characteristic vigor.

Leonard Greene had done his best, as we have seen, to save his friend, first from the object of his affections, and then from himself; and he might well have been forgiven—especially since he had sat up all night to do him these services—if he had now folded his hands and gone to sleep after them. Moreover, it may be wondered why he should have thought it necessary to take any pains at all to prevent his friend's marriage with Madama Lucinda. At the worst, it would only, as he confessed to himself, be hastening the ruin that was sure to come; and he was the last man to entertain such conventional ideas as would be shocked at a young gentleman's "marrying beneath him." But the fact was that, though, in the first instance, he had been the advocate of his friend's interests and of those alone (all he had known of Lucy Lindon, save for her unfortunate appearance in the camera-obscura at Swanborough Hill, having been, let it be remembered, from the lips of her detractors, and therefore to her disadvantage), he had now become the advocate of another party in the suit, though on the same side—namely, of Lucy herself.

It was for her sake, as well as Richard's, though not indeed in the same proportion, that Mr. Greene felt bound to oppose this projected

match. Her frankness, and perhaps her beauty (though he would not have owned to that), had touched him; and he was resolved that, if he could help it, her little savings should never be swallowed up in the great gulf of his friend's excess. He had a secret consciousness that his admiration of this woman—extorted from him, as it had been, in spite of himself—had made him an inefficient advocate with her of her own and his friend's interests. He had not used such plainness of speech as the occasion demanded and as he had intended to use; he had spared her, where it had been weakness to do so, namely, in the picture he had drawn of the ruin that must overtake her if she listened to Richard Talbot's wooing. Dick's mention of his aunt Edith had at once suggested to Mr. Greene the ally most likely to be of service—of the same sex as the lady herself, and therefore not likely to be moved as he had been by her attractions; and one, moreover, who had already combated her upon this very question, and come off victorious. He felt that not a moment was to be lost, if either of these two young people were to be saved; and therefore that very morning, after but scant measure of sleep, Mr. Greene presented himself in Gresham Street.

His visit was, therefore, made upon the Sunday morning, a circumstance which the urgency of the case might well have excused; only, unfortunately, Mr. Greene had forgotten it *was* Sunday. Folks who go to church are, at all events, in a better position than those who don't for knowing the day of the week, and our young friend, I regret to say, was in this respect at a disadvantage. Sister Edith's view of the seventh day was not, of course, so severe as some people's—as that of Mrs. Freeman would have been, for example—but it was mapped out for her, like a chess-board, with "services" from matins to vespers—in which not a square was vacant, and certainly not for such a person as a morning caller. She therefore received Mr. Greene with a certain austerity of manner, which at first staggered, and, when he found out the reason, irritated him exceedingly. He revered Sister Edith on account of her practical benevolence, and it put him out of patience to think how she wasted herself (such was his view of the matter) over Sundays, priests, and saints' days.

"It must be an important affair, Mr. Greene, that brings you here on a Sunday morning," was the remark with which she met him. Mr. Greene thought instantly of that exception which is made respecting one's ox or one's ass falling into a pit—and was there not an ass, at all events, about to fall into a pit in this case? But his good manners saved him from the quotation. What he did say, however, was, "One man esteemeth one day above another, another esteemeth every day alike."

Sister Edith blushed, for she felt herself reproved; like most ladies of her peculiar views, she had had the Scriptures strained for her through the ecclesiastical sieve, and was not so fully acquainted with them as might be wished, in their entirety. If she had been less angelic, the thought of the devil quoting Scripture for his own ends would immediately have occurred to her; but as it was, she only sweetly said, "I beg your pardon, sir; it is true I have no right to judge you."

This brought her visitor (figuratively) to his knees at once.

"You are twenty thousand times better than I, madam, only one likes to have one's own opinion. It is, however, as you have said, no light matter that causes me to intrude upon you. Your nephew is on the very verge of—"

"What? what?" ejaculated Sister Edith, clasping her hands.

"Marrying an actress."

She had thought he was going to say "Death" or "Ruin," and tried in vain to look as if this news had not relieved her.

"Oh, Mr. Greene, how terrible!"

"Well, it's very bad, of course: I come to you as a last chance. Dick himself is deaf to expostulation upon the matter, but perhaps you might persuade the lady to reject him. It is Lucy Lindon."

"Lucy Lindon!"

She was duly shocked, of course, but what was demanded of her was at least more practicable than if the "young person" had been unknown to her.

Then he unfolded to her how it had all happened; nor did he refrain from dwelling upon his friend's habits of extravagance, or withhold from her the increasing peril of his social position. With this, however, she appeared to be already acquainted, or perhaps considerations of a higher kind overpowered her sorrow upon that account.

"My poor Dick! my poor, poor Dick!" was all she said. The words might have been addressed to a pet canary suffering from the pip, but the tone had such pity and love in it as touched the other's tender heart to its very core.

"Your nephew loves you still, madam," he said, "and very dearly, though, as he thinks, you have abandoned him as good for nothing."

"I have *not* abandoned him!" cried she, vehemently; "or at least," she added, with more caution, "if I could see my way to help him, I would take it."

"I felt sure you would, Miss Talbot, when I came here. Here is the address of Madame Lucinda—that is the lady's stage name."

Sister Edith sighed as seraphs may be supposed to sigh when allusion is made to "another place."

"Of course I will go," she said.

"There is no time to be lost in going," suggested Mr. Greene.

"I understand. I am afraid I must leave you now" (she already heard with her mind's ear an importunate little bell tinkling). "A thousand thanks to you for coming to me."

These two people, as far asunder in all else as the poles, had at least this idea in common, and it was a correct one, that there was something of sterling worth in the other.

Mr. Greene went home to his lodgings, and, after reading an adverse criticism in the *Observer* on his play, to bed. Sister Edith repaired to St. Ethelburga's, where she tried, and miserably failed, to avoid thinking of poor Dick and his troubles. It was out of the question, of course, that she could pay her visit to Madam—what was her name?—that unhappy Lucy Lindon "that was?"—upon a Sunday. But she would go to her at an early hour to-morrow morning.

About the time when Father Vane was commencing his sermon, Dick was getting into a hansom cab, and giving this order to the driver: "Knyvett Place, Kilburn."

CHAPTER XLIV.

RELICS.

AFTER his friend's departure, Richard had given himself up to a new indulgence—reflection. His mind was quite made up as to what he would do, but he could not decide as to how he should do it. Should he write to his Lucy, or should he go to her? That was the question. He would have had no doubts if he had been certain that she *was* his Lucy; but of this, in spite of Mr. Greene's somewhat unwilling assurances to that effect, he did not feel confident. He had had many buffets from fortune of late on that smooth round, the race-course, and maybe he thought that to find her fancy-free was too much luck for him.

He had devoted himself for some hours to literary composition, yet without being able to please that most kindly of critics—the author. When he wrote naturally—that is, passionately—the suspicion that his passion might be misplaced troubled him sorely; not that he grudged the waste of force, but feared the force of ridicule. “Dear Dick, I should have been charmed,” she might reply, “but I have been married (or as bad) this ever so long.”

A rebuff of that kind, however agreeably conveyed, would have been terrible. When, on the other hand, he compelled his pen to be calm and reasonable, he felt that it was misrepresenting him. Again, if he should seek a personal interview, to find that he had been forestalled in this woman's affections would inflict upon him not only ridicule, but distress and pain, which she would also share; and, on the other hand, he longed to see her, to speak with her, to touch her, with a yearning even greater than that of the old days. The sight of her, even on the stage, had set him aflame; or, rather, the embers of his old love, which had not died out, in spite of much that had gone to quench them, were once more alive and stirring. His affections were of that common, but by no means valueless, kind which demand a visible object. He had no imagination which could picture the loved one in absence as though she were present: verses to his mistress's eyebrows were impossible to him, and, if they had been possible, would have given him no satisfaction. If for this lack of fancy Dick is to be called coarse, nine men out of ten are coarse. His term for poetry was “rot;” and in so calling it he manifested no universal callousness, but only an unusual courage. He possessed courage, and honor too, within limits; generosity, kindness of heart, and, as we have seen, a sense of justice. He was weak and foolish, but by no means despicable; nor were his present feelings such as he had any need to be ashamed of. After a long struggle, he resolved to present himself in Knyvet Place in person.

Figure him in the hansom, “shooting his linen” (pulling out his shirt-cuffs to the uttermost) in nervous excitement, and picturing to himself his probable reception; how she would look, what she would say, and wondering to himself whether he should presently come back again crowned with bliss, his Lucy's accepted lover for the second time, or whether, as he put it in his simple fashion, it would all turn out “a frost and a sell.” Of course he “kept” the

hansom: it was his custom, though he was stopping anywhere for hours; and in this case it seemed especially necessary that he should have a place of immediate retreat—something to throw himself into, and be whisked away in on the instant.

Madame Lucinda was “at home”—she did not go to church in the morning, it seemed, or perhaps her late hours of the preceding night made this occasion an exceptional one—and Dick was ushered into the little drawing-room. If his enemies said he had no heart, they wronged him, for it was palpitating violently—beating like the strokes of a piston, and as it ebbed and flowed, his still boyish cheeks grew white and red.

Presently Lucy entered, with pale face, but wonderfully calm and self-possessed. She was elegantly dressed, and had a style of fashion (or so he thought it) about her which greatly increased her visitor's embarrassment. The little speeches which he had prepared coming along in the cab fled from his brain; he could not address this gorgeous being as he had intended. She was not the Lucy Lindon of the old days at all, though he confessed to himself that she looked a thousand times more beautiful.

“How are you, Mr. Talbot?”

This might have chilled him but for the touch of her hand, which

“Throbbled his pulses with the fulness of the spring.”

His embarrassment was at once exchanged for delirium.

“Oh, Lucy!” he murmured—“Lucy!”

“To what am I indebted, sir, for the honor of this visit?” It was cruel of her to torment him thus; but then women are always cruel to us poor worms when on the hook.

“I—I—ought to have come before,” he stammered; “long, long ago. I was a fool to allow myself to be torn away from you.”

She opened wide her hazel eyes, as if in astonishment at this extraordinary language.

“Why so?” she inquired.

“Because I love you! because I have always loved you.”

“You loved Lucy Lindon when you were a boy, Mr. Talbot. All that is over.”

“And why should it not begin again?” put in Richard, naively.

“Because we are so different, both of us; I especially.”

“Now it is coming,” he thought; “she is going to confess things.” He wanted to murder “some person unknown.”

“You are led by a false light, sir,” she went on—“merely the reflection of that which once guided you. You may think you love me still, and I thank you for the compliment”—here she courtiesed—“but you are deceiving yourself.”

“I am quite sure I love you, Lucy; I wish I could be sure that you could love me.”

“Might, could, would, or should, do you mean, sir?”

Dick was scarlet. This woman, it seemed, could read his inmost thoughts.

“Well, of course, if you love anybody else, Lucy, better than me,” he stammered, “I cannot ask you to marry me. I have lost all claim upon you—I feel that. It is true it was you who gave me up, and not I you; but it was my peo-

ple who were the cause. I have no right to reproach you, whatever may have happened." Here he grew quite pale again.

"What you say is but just," returned she, quietly. "I have had a hard life, Richard, among hard people; but they were not all hard. Some of them have been very kind to me, for my own sake; and others were kind after another fashion. I took my own way in life (as you have heard), and it has been full of peril. Your people will have more reason now than ever to distrust and disown me."

Richard made a gesture of impatience. He cared nothing for the opinion of his "people." Every moment he felt himself drawn more and more toward this idol of his boyhood, whom he now beheld transformed into a veritable goddess.

"I say, Richard, you should well weigh this matter—even if you do not value the advice of others—before renewing an attachment which has been already condemned, and which has since become far more open to condemnation. To pretend that I do not love you is a crime—a crime," she repeated, vehemently, "which I will not twice commit, but—"

"Lucy, my darling Lucy!" he cried, springing to his feet.

"Stop, Richard!" said she, sternly. "It shall not be said that I have taken advantage of your impetuous passion to wrest from you a rash proposal. You must know who it is whom you would marry."

"I do know her," he answered; "the only woman I have ever loved."

A smile—I am afraid a somewhat cynical smile—curled her proud lip.

"You *did* know her," she said, "and you once loved her; but if you knew her now, you might cease to love her. Richard, I have had presents given me by one who loves me truly, and I returned his love."

"I don't care if you did, Lucy," was his magnanimous avowal; "if only you will now be mine."

"Stop, sir, stop! I returned his love, but I did not return his presents—which are here," and she placed before him the pin-cushion and thimble which had been Richard's first gift to her as a child.

When discreet Mrs. Eldridge knocked at the drawing-room door, she found the young people on very good terms with one another.

"What, Annie! you here?" cried Dick.

"Of course I am." She felt it hard her daughter should not have thought it worth while to mention the fact, notwithstanding she had been so evidently otherwise engaged. "You don't suppose I would have let Lucy live in London all alone, Master Richard?"

"Of course not; I had forgotten that. But you mustn't call me Master Richard any more. You used to be my foster-mother, Annie; but henceforth you will be my mother-in-law."

"Lors, Master Richard, you take the very breath out of my body! What will folks say at Durnton?"

Lucy broke out into a laugh, so ringing, so cheerful, though it was not loud, that it sounded like joy's self set to music.

"My dear mother is always thinking of public opinion—at Durnton," she explained. Then Dick laughed too, and very heartily; for he pict-

ured to himself Mrs. Freeman's face when she should hear the news.

"I think I know what they will say, Annie. They will say that they always predicted it. We shall confer a great pleasure on them by proving how sagacious they all were."

Mrs. Eldridge sighed, and shook her head. She was by no means of opinion they would be pleased. Nor was the good woman pleased herself at what had happened, notwithstanding that it had made her daughter so happy. "I hope it is all for the best," she said; "but Lucy was making her way in the world; and they do say, Master Richard—and I believe it's true, for your money always burned in your pockets ever since you wore 'em—that you are on the road to ruin."

"Mother, mother!" exclaimed Lucy, reprovingly.

"You are quite right, Annie," said Richard; "but with Lucy to help me, I mean henceforward to be a good boy."

It was an honest speech, and had the simplicity of the boy to recommend it; but what was the value of such a promise? Was it a genuine guarantee of future improvement, or only an undertaking to be good—until next time?

Mrs. Eldridge had probably heard a good deal more of Master Richard's goings on than he had any idea of; she smiled, of course, but it was a very dubious smile.

"Come, mother, Dick must not be taken to task to-day," pleaded Lucy. "We have been having a long talk together, and he assures me that he will henceforth give up his extravagant habits for my sake."

"I will indeed," assented Dick. "Everything is right and jolly. And look here, since the day is so fine, I'll have the drag out and take you both to Richmond. We'll dine at the Star and—"

"What's the matter, Annie?" His mother-in-law to be, who was looking out of the window, had uttered an exclamation of terror.

"Matter!" cried the game-keeper's widow; "there's matter enough. Your aunt, Miss Talbot, all in her popish dress, too (which shows she means mischief), has just got out of a cab."

CHAPTER XLV.

AT DAGGERS DRAWN.

At the thought of Sister Edith's propinquity, the knees of two, at least, of the little company in Knyvett Place were "loosened with dismay."

The feelings of Richard and his foster-mother could, without much injustice, be compared with those of two rogues who, while dividing the communion-plate in a church vestry, suddenly perceived the clergyman coming up the aisle. It was not so bad, of course, as if it had been the policeman, but it was a catastrophe next akin to it. Sister Edith had no power, indeed, to forbid the banners or quench the torch of Cupid, but the affectionate respect that Richard entertained for her carried a weight of authority with it which with him probably far exceeded that of the law. He remembered the great sacrifice she had made for him as respected his grandfather's will, and was by no means unconscious that throughout his life, until his own misconduct had placed him

out of the pale of her ministrations, she had never ceased her endeavors to promote his welfare. Unexpected as was his aunt's appearance at Madame Lucinda's door, and unaccountable as were the means by which she had been led thither, the cause of her coming was evident enough, and gave him not alarm, indeed, but genuine pain.

Mrs. Parkes, on the other hand, was well-nigh frightened out of her wits. Her awe of "the family," as she termed the Talbots, as though there was not such another race in the world, was extreme, and indeed formed one of her chief objections to her daughter's marriage with Richard; and what she had vaguely heard, through village gossip, of Sister Edith herself, made her more alarmed at that lady than she had been of the squire himself. Her hereditary authority as a Talbot seemed to be supplemented by the powers of the Roman Catholic Church, and made her formidable in Mrs. Parkes's eyes beyond expression. Her advice to Dick upon the present occasion, had she ventured to give it, would have been to surrender at discretion, and accompany his aunt to afternoon service at St. Ethelburga's on the instant. As it was, she counselled an immediate flight of the whole party by the back door, which communicated with the Kilburn road, and that the maid should be instructed to say that her mistress was in the country.

Lucy alone was resolute and self-possessed.

"Go up-stairs, mother," said she, authoritatively, "and take Richard with you. I will see Miss Talbot alone."

Dick was by no means sorry to be spared the coming encounter, but his good instincts did not wholly desert him.

"Remember, Lucy, Aunt Edie has been always kind to me;" then added, after a moment's hesitation, "and she has been more generous and self-sacrificing for my sake than you have the least idea of."

"I will not forget it," answered Lucy, quietly, as she closed the door upon him: then, with one glance at the looking-glass—analogous to that which the warrior casts upon his armor ere he meets the foe—she waited for the coming footfall.

The next moment Miss Talbot was announced. The two women had not met since that last interview in Ford's Alley, and in the mean time both had changed. Sister Edith had become a middle-aged woman; her hair, which would still have been luxuriant had her simple disposition of it permitted it to appear so, was thickly sprinkled with gray; her features were more sharply defined, and in their expression graver than of yore; they had an ascetic cast. The sweetness of disposition which her gentle eyes were wont to betray, if not altogether absent, was shadowed by a severe purpose.

On the other hand, Lucy was scarcely recognizable as the simple and unfashioned girl, ignorant of the world, and indeed of everything save the strength of her own will and feelings, who had given up her all at the other's bidding. Stately, beautiful, and becomingly attired, she looked in every way the social superior of the figure in homely gray.

Sister Edith noted the change, and by no means approved of it. "I am come here, Lucy, if I may still call you so (she was not speaking in humility, as the other well understood; she meant, if you are still worthy of that familiar

name), upon a most unpleasant errand—the same, however, on which I came to you once before."

Lucy bent her head, if you can so call the deflection of half a quarter of an inch. They stood face to face, for Sister Edith had declined the chair her hostess had offered to her, nor had she taken her hand.

"It is a day on which I do not usually make visits. I had intended to have called to-morrow, but circumstances have compelled me to come at once."

Mr. Greene had sent this note to Gresham Street by hand: "Just called on Dick; he is off, I believe, to Knyvett Place: not a moment is to be lost."

"They are very grave circumstances. I hear that my nephew Richard intends to renew his engagement with you—that he even meditates coming here to-day."

"He is here at this moment, madam. It is his cab you found at the door."

The news was bad enough, but the coolness with which it was communicated seemed to Sister Edith even more reprehensible. The very look of Knyvett Place had shocked her; she had been well accustomed to the haunts of ignorance and crime, but those of fashionable vice and folly were unknown to her; from what she had heard of them, however, Knyvett Place (inhabited by five City clerks, an architect, an inspector of nuisances, and poor Lucy) had appeared to her a sink of iniquity. And here was one of its indwellers, a flaunting, brazen woman, whose profession was the stage, and whose practice probably much worse than her profession.

"Here! under this roof! And you have the face to tell me so?"

"I do not understand you, madam," was Lucy's cold reply.

The other's tone had frozen her.

"You told me, the last time I spoke to you on this subject," said Sister Edith, somewhat less harshly, for she at once perceived the ill effects of her virtuous indignation, "that you had done with Richard forever; that you would not encourage him by word or deed."

"Nor have I done so."

"And yet he is now here."

"I did not promise, if he came to me unasked, that I would refuse to see him. Since you affect authority over him, why not address your arguments to him? Why come to me, who owe you no obedience?"

"Because you have entangled—I mean, because you have obtained an influence over him which I cannot combat."

Lucy smiled—a smile of which she took no pains to conceal the triumph.

"And yet I have not spoken to him, madam, save this morning, for four years."

"Then it is infatuation!" exclaimed Edith, mechanically. "You ask me why I come to you; it is because I hoped, in spite of what I heard and what I feared, that there might be some good and generous instincts left in you, such as you once possessed. I am not here to judge you or reproach you. Years ago you acknowledged by your own act that you were not a fitting bride for Richard Talbot; can you venture to tell me that as his wife you will less disgrace him now?"

"Madam, I have borne enough," returned Lucy, haughtily. "Nay" (for the other had begun some halting sentence of apology or conciliation), "I do not refer to your insulting and unseemly words, but to the past—my past. I have borne enough for the sake of you and yours, which at that time I thought was for the sake of Richard. To you, Miss Talbot, it may seem presumptuous to say I loved him; yet if you have really sunk all thoughts of birth and rank in your spiritual calling, that fact should be intelligible to you."

A faint blush came into Sister Edith's face. "I fail," she said, "to catch your meaning."

"Then I must speak more plainly. It seems to me, madam, that you, being vowed to I know not what—the Church or Heaven—have forgotten, or perhaps have never known, what it is to love. It is not so with a poor creature like myself."

"A sinful creature!" murmured the other, accompanied, however, with a glance of pity.

"Yes, as compared with you, no doubt. Though, madam, let me tell you that no disgrace, such as you are thinking of, attaches to me. I am a woman pure as yourself, if not so saintly."

"Thank Heaven for that, at least!" said Edith, naively. "But if this is so, Lucy—and I do believe it—if you have resisted evil in perilous paths, there must be much of good and right in you, and pity for those who are on their way to ruin. Pity Richard, then. Do not, by allying yourself with him, destroy what regard is still entertained for him by others. He is wedded to evil courses; his habits of excess have become second nature with him; he will one day want bread. In a worldly point of view, the position of her who may become his wife will be far from enviable. I do not, however, argue with you on that ground."

"Miss Talbot," answered Lucy, coldly, "you may argue how you please; any stick is good enough to beat a dog with. But this time your logic will not avail you. You speak of 'pity.' Well, I have pity, I hope, but it includes some pity for myself this time. You are good enough to warn me on my own account against marrying your nephew. I thank you, but must decline your advice. I know very well what I am about to do. I have heard it said of him—and you have just now hinted the same thing—that those who would counsel him might as well talk to the winds. In this matter his case is mine; all argument, all remonstrance, with me is unavailing, for a reason you do not understand—I love him."

"You are right," said Sister Edith, coldly; "I do not understand the nature of that love which would harm its object. You will be Richard's ruin."

"Nay, madam, you have already said he will be ruined in any case. He will now be ruined in company, instead of alone, which is always a consolation."

"You are a reckless woman, Lucy, and, though you flatter yourself otherwise, I fear, a heartless one," said Sister Edith, sternly. "Your words, though you do not know it, are the promptings of Satan."

Lucy laughed aloud—not the laugh of an hour ago, but one of cynical bitterness.

"There is one object, madam, with which, inferior as I am to you in all other branches of knowledge, I must claim to be better acquainted than yourself. An actress, you see, is a child of Satan; and I am positively certain he is not now prompting me."

"Graceless girl, apt pupil of your godless stepfather, I have done with you!" cried Sister Edith.

Lucy turned white as the dainty collar about her throat. "Then go!" she said, and pointed to the door.

The battle was over, and she had conquered; but when the door had closed upon the retreating foe, her face showed no sign of triumph. She sunk into her chair and burst into tears. They had been near her eyes, though never visible, half a dozen times during that interview.

"God help him! God help him!" she murmured.

Sister Edith, with her hands crossed upon her bosom, was at the same moment uttering the self-same prayer.

"Well, Lucy, what has happened?" asked Richard, coming softly into the room. "Your mother has been half dead with fear."

"What was there to be afraid of, my dear Dick? Of course it was an unpleasant scene, but you see I have got over it."

"I hope you were not hard upon Aunt Edie, darling."

"Not I. I was obliged, however, to tell her the truth." He does not ask, thought Lucy, bitterly, "Was she hard on me?"

"Quite right. But you've been crying, my sweet."

"No, I haven't; my eyes are a little weak this morning; some fresh air will do me good. You were talking of taking us to Richmond."

"And so I will. Do you prefer a carriage and two posters or the drag?"

"Oh, the drag! I love four horses—I wish it was the custom to drive six."

"That is just my view, my darling. How admirably our tastes agree! We shall be the happiest married couple in all London."

CHAPTER XLVI.

A PERFECT PARADISE.

It has become very difficult even for people of condition to make a stir in the world of London. The commission of a murder goes no way at all, unless the attempts at subsequent concealment are of an original character; bigamy is an every-day affair, and has, besides, become so exclusively "literary property" that the newspapers pass it over, and, by tacit consent, leave the subject to be dealt with by the novelists. Unless a new crime should be invented, the laurel of notoriety is scarcely within the reach of anybody.

The engagement, therefore, of Richard Talbot, of the Tower, Durnton, to Madame Lucinda, late of the Mirabel Theatre, Hoxton, attracted but little public attention. Still, as the young couple were both widely known, though in very different circles, it did furnish a topic of conversation. The men expressed their opinion that he might have done worse; and the women drew

themselves up, and replied, "Good gracious! how?"

Old Walter Pole acknowledged that his prophecy at Francis Talbot's funeral had failed of its fulfilment. "I said he would marry the wench in six months, and he has taken four years about it."

Everybody else about Durnton had "foreseen the thing from the first," and expected no better than what had happened. As a subject to talk about, it was, of course, a godsend to the neighborhood, and put the nose out of joint of the crops, the game prospects, and the county elections. The rector and his wife alone were reticent upon the matter. The former remembered that Dick was still the squire of the parish, as well as the son of his old friend; the latter could not forget that Lucy Lindon would presently be the mistress of the Tower, and a branch, though grafted on to it in a very unsatisfactory manner, of the genealogical tree. Mrs. Freeman had responsibilities which her neighbors had not, and, besides, had some common-sense of her own. She looked forward to a time when the present indignation should have passed away, and things should have found their level. Would it be well, then, that she and Mrs. Richard Talbot should be at daggers drawn? She knew enough of that young lady's character to feel she must make her choice of peace and war at once, for that there would be no subsequent loop-hole of escape if she chose war.

The rector was dreadfully alarmed lest Richard should have asked him to come up to town to perform the marriage ceremony, which, fortunately, he did not. The idea never entered into the young man's head. He was married in Kilburn church by the vicar of the parish, and there were present on the occasion, besides the bride and bridegroom, just three persons—Mr. Leonard Greene, Mrs. Parkes, and—Lady Earnshaw.

The last-named had written her grandson this characteristic note:

"DEAR DICK,—Let me know when and where you are going to be married, as I mean to be there. Yours affectionately,

"CATHERINE EARNSHAW."

And of course the information had been given to her. Perhaps Sister Edith was not sorry that her aunt took this step, but she could not bring herself to countenance the affair by her own presence. "Such a marriage," she averred, "cannot but end ill."

"Very likely, my dear," the old lady had replied. "But, at all events, we should give the young people as good a start as possible. There shall be at least one person at Dick's wedding to represent the family. You tell me that you believe the young woman is respectable, which is unusual in such cases, and therefore I shall give her my countenance, and a marriage present. I have known a duke and two peers in my time who have married play-actresses, and their wives did not make them worse than they were before."

As to arguing with her ladyship when she had once made up her mind on a matter, nobody *who knew her ever attempted it*. She even attended the bridal breakfast in Knyvett Place.

Sister Edith, who was a woman still, in spite of everything, was consumed with curiosity to know how matters had "gone off," and as her aunt would not volunteer a syllable of information, she was compelled to ask for it.

"I thought you felt the whole matter too shocking to be talked about," replied the old lady. "Dick looked very nice, and the young lady charming; quite beautiful enough, my dear, to excuse any man for doing anything."

"She must have been very grateful to you for your presence."

"She expressed herself, my dear, to that effect, and, I am bound to say, with great propriety." When Lady Earnshaw said, "I am bound to say," she always meant, "I am very happy to say," so Edith knew that Lucy had made a favorable impression. She did not grudge it her, we may be sure.

"Had you any private talk with—Lucy?"

"A few words, my dear, which, being, as you say, private, I am not at liberty to repeat. My impression is the girl means well. She will do her best for Richard, until she finds it is no use, which I fear will be very soon. I have seen so many cases like poor Dick's."

Lady Earnshaw spoke truth; she might have added that she had had a very near experience of them. It was lucky for her that her husband was only alive (if, indeed, he still was so) to her own morbid fancy. Had he not been at the bottom of the sea, he would probably have long ago been in the depths of ruin, and she with him. It was curious that, though she had not lost faith in him, she had lost faith in others through his example.

"Then even you think their case is hopeless," said Sister Edith, "though you went to the wedding."

"Everybody likes to come out of matters with clean hands, my dear; but they have different ways of doing it. The good people—to whom I don't belong, you know—accomplish it by washing their hands of all their unsatisfactory relations; that is not my way. Give me a cup of tea, my dear."

It was clear that Lucy had one very unexpected ally.

Mr. Leonard Greene, too, could be thoroughly relied on by the young couple. He had opposed the match, as we have seen, and yet had been Richard's best (and only) man at the wedding. He was of opinion not only that it is no use to cry over spilled milk, but that it is our duty to efface the traces of the catastrophe as best we can. At the same time, this was by no means his view of moral crimes. He was forgiving in the case of personal injuries—though he could never stand a slight—but he was adamant to scoundrels. He would not speak to some men, notwithstanding they were very well received in society, because it might be of one base action they had committed. He held that to commit a baseness, a man must be base. When remonstrated with for his want of charity, he would say he pretended to no such virtue. When reminded that it might be the delinquent's first offense, he would answer: "Then he must be very unlucky to have been discovered so early. I can't afford to know unlucky people." It would have surprised and even alarmed him to have been told that he was a man of principle;

but even among the Bohemians, with whom he chiefly consorted, his opinion had a certain weight; and it was good for the young couple to have Leonard Greene upon their side. He was a fighting man; he did not belong to the mere transport corps of one's acquaintance, and certainly not to the chaplains. When a friend was decried in his presence, he was not content with "deploring" his weaknesses, but defended him and them with sharp and shining steel.

But, except for her ladyship and Mr. Greene, the young couple had the world against them.

Lucy, indeed, might have kept her own friends, had she thought proper; kind-hearted folks in their way some of them were, whom it gave her a pang to part with; but, for her husband's sake, she resolved to withdraw herself from all her 'Mirabel' acquaintances. If his friends and relatives chose to be ashamed of the woman he had chosen for his wife, they should at least have no excuse for it in her conduct. She might have kept them all, and welcome, so far as Dick was concerned; but she knew what was best for him. The idea that Lucy had in her mind, and of which, touched by that lady's kindness, she had dropped a hint to Lady Earnshaw, was that she should hold her husband in bonds that he should not feel, and keep him straight without his knowing it. He was to have his way in everything, but not all his way. She counted much on Richard's genuine devotion for her, and resolved to turn it all to his own benefit. The question was whether she, or any human power, could rescue him from those extravagant and wasteful courses which had become the habit of his life. Dick was not ostentatious, but that was the only form of prodigality in which he did not indulge; he would have lighted a cigar with a five-pound note rather than trouble himself to reach a spill from the mantel-piece.

It was not from mere sentiment, therefore, or appreciation of the beauties of nature, that Lucy elected to spend the honey-moon in the Isle of Wight instead of Paris. Dick had proposed Paris because he thought it would please Lucy, and he bowed to her choice at once, as he would have done if it had been Gravesend. He felt that he should be in heaven anywhere so long as he was with his bride; nor was he mistaken; only, perhaps, it did not strike him that one's wife would not be one's bride forever.

Of course a hotel—at Ventnor or elsewhere—was not to be thought of; he hired a "perfect paradise," as the advertisement called it, at the back of the island, which was not to be let for less than three months, but which one might have for one month if one paid the rent for three. A wood shaded it from the sun; a garden, aglow with flowers, sloped down from it to the sea. Lucy thought she had never seen anything so beautiful, even on a drop-scene.

"Oh, Richard, how happy I am!" she was constantly saying; to which he would reply, "Of course you are, darling; all angels are happy."

At the end of two days, however, as they were sitting on the lawn together, she heard him sigh.

"My darling Dick, what is the matter?"

"Nothing, dearest; I was only thinking what a pity it is that Goodwood is over—one could have run down there from this place so easily."

The idea of his wishing to exchange the "per-

fect paradise" for a race-course was a grievous blow to her; but she was far too wise to reproach him. His occupation had been the pursuit of pleasure, and it was natural he should suffer *ennui*, now that it was intermitted, just as a bar-rister in full practice feels bored in the long vacation. The difficulty was to provide him with wholesome amusements to take the place of the old ones.

After much thought upon the matter, Lucy resolved to affect a desire to go to Durnton. It was the beginning of the shooting season, so Richard would find something to do there. After the partridges would come the pheasants, and after the pheasants the fox-hounds, so that his time would be accounted for till the spring; and by that time—who could tell?—it was possible that he might have struck root in the old place, and be content to dwell there among old friends and neighbors.

It was the safest scheme she could hit upon, if it could but be accomplished, and therefore she began at once to advocate it, though, so far as she was concerned, it held forth small attractions indeed.

Mrs. Richard Talbot quite understood what sort of reception she was personally likely to meet with from her Durnton neighbors. As the actress who had "hooked" the young master of the Tower, she was prepared for cold shoulders; but what would make her position still more difficult was the companionship of her mother. It was possible that, for her husband's sake, or for their own, she might herself be "called upon" by the neighborhood, and a certain sort of intimacy be established; but it was not to be hoped for that the neighborhood would have anything (of a polite nature) to say to Mrs. Parkes, the widow of the late squire's game-keeper, who would have been transported for manslaughter had he not had the good fortune to be drowned. And yet to part with her mother was a terrible trial. For though to the common eye that good lady might not be strong-minded, nor distinguished for her conversational powers, nor for the elegance of her personal appearance, to Lucy she was very dear, and deservedly so. This good woman had cast in her own lot with Lucy's—though very far from hopeful of the result—and, in spite of all the remonstrances of Aunt Susan, had stood by her when she had taken her wilful way stageward. Her companionship, her countenance, had been everything to her daughter, as the latter was well aware; she had never murmured at the inconveniences to which she had been subjected in a mode of life especially unsuited to her homely disposition; she had watched and waited on her with a patience and fidelity no money could have purchased; she had been her comfort in days of dependency, and her safeguard in times of temptation; and with a heart of wax, so far as its tenderness was concerned, and its capability of being moulded to her wishes, she had been ever as leal and true to her as steel. At present she was "keeping house" in Knyvett Place; but could Lucy always leave her there alone? Would a due supply of food, and raiment, and lodging be a meet return to such a mother for years of self-sacrifice and devotion? On the other hand, if she was to live with the young couple, the Durnton scheme would have to be given up.

In this dilemma Richard himself unconscious-

ly came to the rescue. Mention having been casually made of Susan Parkes, in the course of which Lucy gratefully acknowledged the obligations she had been at all times under to her aunt—she was thinking, doubtless, more especially of the little woman's generous though ineffectual attempt to take her place at the music-hall—Dick immediately proposed that something should be done for her. An opportunity had arisen—and this time a creditable one—to indulge his fancy for spending money; and he at once declared that this excellent person should be made independent, if possible.

"I don't think Aunt Susan would take your money, darling," said Lucy, thoughtfully; "but perhaps, if we managed it discreetly, we could induce her to live with mother. I could not let mother be quite alone in the world, Dick."

"Of course not. I thought she was to live with us," returned the bridegroom, naively.

Lucy devoured him with her loving eyes; it did not occur to her that neither the social difficulty nor the terrors of a resident mother-in-law had ever so much as entered his head; she only perceived his generosity and willingness to please her in all things.

"That would scarcely do, darling; if we go to Durnton, everybody would look down on poor mother there."

"Then don't let us go to Durnton" (it was thus he proposed to dismiss a scheme of which she had been urging the propriety with great tact and skill for days); "let us go to Brighton or Paris."

"No, Dick, we must go to Durnton. I have set my heart on that."

"Then mine must be set on it too, darling, since we have but one heart between us," was the bridegroom's reply.

So when their month was up, the still happy pair exchanged the "perfect paradise" for Durnton.

CHAPTER XLVII.

LUCY AT DURNTON.

To the common view, the benefactors of the human race are but of two kinds: (1) Benevolent persons who give their money to hospitals and other charitable institutions; and (2) scientific persons who root out diseases like Jenner, or dull pain like Simpson. But the individual who provides conversation on a large scale, and of an exciting description, for the unfortunates who live in the country and are at their wits' end for a topic, has surely no slight claim to rank in the same category. For the squire of the parish and the representative of a long line of ancestors, who have never attempted any such public benefaction, to marry an actress and bring her down with him, after his honey-moon, to his country-seat, is, it must be admitted, a blessing to all his neighbors; but the misfortune is that they often look on it as a mere godsend—a boon for which they have to thank the general course of events, and not the particular person to whom they are indebted for it. On the contrary, they are disposed to resent his conduct while enjoying the *fruits of it*—every description of gossip, scandal, and tittle-tattle—to their heart's content.

Thus it happened with Richard Talbot, when he brought home his bride to Durnton Tower.

Their names, especially hers, were upon every tongue. Old gentlemen, given to apoplexy, grew purple as they coughed and chuckled over them; old ladies, who in public frowned and threw their heads up, like impatient steeds, at the mention of them, in private winked, blinked, and giggled over them in appreciative disapprobation. The young gentlemen looked forward to flirtations with Dick's fair enslaver of a kind unheard of in their county practice; the young ladies were dying to see this abominable and designing creature, but would die sooner than be introduced to her upon equal terms. It was carried *nem. con.* by all who represented "society" in the neighborhood that the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Talbot among them was to be ignored; and if circumstances should necessitate more stringent measures, even that they should be cut.

Unconscious of this arming of the population against them, the young couple came down to Durnton, and established themselves at the Tower. Mr. and Mrs. Freeman, as in duty bound, called on them the following day. The interview was an embarrassing one; for the rector's wife, though she made no allusion to the change in their relative positions, could not forbear a certain air of patronage, which tried her hostess's powers of patience to the utmost, and, moreover, the two women had not a thought in common. However, Lucy so acquitted herself that Mrs. Freeman afterward acknowledged that there was "nothing flagrant" in her manner.

On this the rector was encouraged to remark, that really Richard might have done worse—a point that could scarcely be conceded.

"Worse!" replied she, with asperity. "Well, yes; he might have married a papist."

Mr. Lucker, the mellifluous, paid his respects the next afternoon; and these three comprised the whole of the young couple's visiting-list.

At first this isolation did not make itself felt. The "happy pair" were well content with each other's company; and the return to their native village afforded food for thought and talk to both of them. Lucy could not help contrasting, not without some feeling of triumph, her position as mistress of the Tower, with what it had been when she had last left Durnton; but her nature was not of that complacent kind that can sustain itself on self-congratulation. She soon understood that everybody else had this same contrast in their minds, and that they resented it. If she had had her own feelings only to consult, she would have left the Tower, shaking the Durnton dust from her feet, within a month of her arrival there, and never return to it again. Had she put away from her her own mother to conciliate these heartless aristocrats, only to receive from them contempt and cold neglect? If they despised her, she also despised and hated them from the very bottom of her heart. But, then, there was Richard. If he was but content—if life could by any means be made agreeable to him at Durnton—she would bear all without complaint. But the cup she had to drink was a very bitter one. It is among the things not generally known, that people who have neither rank nor money to plume themselves upon may still possess a proud spirit. Nature sometimes puts

things ridiculously out of place, and she had made Lucy both proud and sensitive.

Men came to the Tower for weeks at a time for the shooting, but they did not bring their womankind; and when they asked Richard to shoot with them in return, their invitations, even when they had wives of their own, did not include his wife.

At first Richard refused to go. He "damned their impudence." To Lucy's entreaties that he should accept their hospitality, he answered, "If you are good enough for me, my dear—and you are ten times too good for me—you are good enough for them: you are worth all their wives and daughters put together."

She was well pleased at his indignation upon her account, but she still pressed his going, and in the end he acceded to her wishes. It would never do for him, she knew, to be cooped up with her in the Tower, without companions.

Richard was willing to have as much good shooting as he could get; but he was still very leal to her.

At the manor, to which he was invited by Henry Pole, his grandfather being ill and broken by this time, and no longer equal to playing the part of host, Richard spoke to Margaret Pole quite frankly about his wife.

"You used to be an honest, kind-hearted girl," he said, "and we are old friends, Madge. Why do you join these hateful women in their cabal against my Lucy?" And he told her how good and true she was, and with what unselfishness she had behaved.

Miss Pole was greatly moved. "I am not mistress here," she said (Miss Latour still ruled); "and, besides, I am a coward. I did not dare to set my own opinion (which was on your side) against that of everybody else. But now I will call on your wife. I perceive it is my duty."

Margaret had grown very grave and serious; her grandfather had complained of late that religion had got hold of her, and he was not yet at such a pass to regard with patience anything of that kind. Her brother defended her; he acknowledged that she was not the girl she was, but thought "if they could only get her married she would be all right." This was difficult in Margaret's case, who was in a high social position, but without a shilling for certain to call her own. No one quite knew what might have been the full extent of the old gentleman's extravagance—whether he might leave a few thousands or only mortgages.

Strange to say, the girl clung to her grandfather rather than to her brother, and tended him with affectionate solicitude.

Her promise to visit Lucy gave Richard great satisfaction, and it would no doubt have been performed but for a domestic calamity. Old Walter Pole had a paralytic seizure, which sent the shooting party to their homes, and Richard among them, and made Margaret a close prisoner. This was a great misfortune; for, notwithstanding much cynical talk to the contrary, a true woman needs some companion of her own sex. Lucy passed many a weary hour, solitary and sad, though she never let Richard read it in her face; indeed, when he returned to her, she was no longer sad, and he was not one to picture to himself a condition of affairs that did not *present itself to his outward eye.*

One visitor occasionally came to the Tower, who, for gentleness, sympathy, and, I must add, in his gross ignorance of the sports of the field, was almost a woman. This was Leonard Greene. When the other guests, gun in hand, were brushing the dew from the turnip tops or struggling through the copses, or while they urged their wild career after "the red dog with the bushy tail," Mr. Greene stayed within-doors with the lady of the house; wherefrom sprung a great deal of scandal. For the very ladies who had outlawed Lucy, and cut her off from the society of her sex, were prompt to seize upon this companionship as a proof of their own good judgment. It was very lucky that they had shown no such weakness toward her, as some—though, to say the truth, Miss Pole had been the only one—from mistaken charity would have suggested. This unhappy young person was carrying on a disgraceful flirtation under her own roof, and within six months of her marriage; but what better could be expected of her, considering her relatives and antecedents?

Of course they wronged her, and Mr. Greene also. He was, above all things, a gentleman—not of "the man of honor" kind—and the idea with which these excellent people credited him had never so much as entered his head. He admired Lucy, but at least as much for her pluck and independence as for her beauty; and he liked her best of all because, in his judgment—and with respect to men and women at least, it was no mean one—she was so good a wife to Richard. She never told him of her fears for her husband, but he understood them, as well as the efforts, undemonstrative and subtle though they were, which she made to win him from his wild courses, and to teach him to find his happiness in home. And they touched him all the more because he knew that they were in vain.

A man need not go to Newmarket to bet any more than he need go to the City to speculate; and Richard, though he had ceased to attend race-courses, made up his little book as usual, and lost his thousands by it. Did she know this, Greene wondered, or did she not?

At last the matter was put beyond a doubt.

On a certain Sunday, when they had all been to church together—for the young squire attended morning service in the most exemplary manner—the rector, walking home with them, ventured, notwithstanding his wife's presence, to congratulate Mrs. Talbot upon her fine voice.

"You are quite an acquisition to our village choir," he said.

"I am used to singing in church," said Lucy, simply. "You know I used to sing at St. Ethelburga's:" whereat Mrs. Freeman sniffed disapprobation; she could have hardly felt more shocked if Lucy had referred to her stage experiences.

Mr. Greene, when turning over the leaves of Lucy's music for her that evening, as usual, referred to this conversation, and, *apropos* of it, remarked how diligent she was—and not without favorable results—in the cultivation of her voice.

"It may be of use to me some day," she said, smiling. "When bank-notes are all gone and spent, these other notes may be most excellent." She spoke in jest, but her companion felt from that moment that Lucy feared the worst consequences from her husband's extravagance, and was preparing in this humble fashion for the

day of adversity. He judged rightly; but there was a reason known only to Lucy herself that was now prompting her more than ever to make provision for the future.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

GOOD ADVICE, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

WHEN the shooting and hunting were over was the crucial time as regarded Richard's content with country life: for, though it is possible for an idle man without a love for books, and who is no sportsman, to rusticate without *ennui*, it requires a certain indolence of disposition; and, moreover, that he should either never have devoted himself to the pursuit of pleasure, or else have been sickened of it. And the case of Richard did not fulfil these conditions. It so happened, however, that the lease of one of his largest farms had fallen in, and as the tenant was not desirous to renew, Richard took it into his own hands. In this novel occupation he took a quite unlooked-for interest, and had the occurrence happened earlier, there is no saying but that his lines of life might have taken a wholly different direction; but his father before him had had, as we know, no turn for agricultural pursuits, and had never dreamed of any taste for them lying dormant in his son. Richard, wholly inexperienced, and difficult to be advised (unless a certain subtlety was employed, not usually to be found in farm bailiffs) did not find himself in a favorable position for prosecuting this new pursuit to a profit; but the loss was nothing in his case as compared with the gain of an occupation that attracted him, which, strange to say, he found.

There was a certain simplicity in Dick's character, underlying all his wild ways, which now seemed to have discovered a natural channel of action. He rose with the lark (instead, as before, of retiring to rest about that period), and went to bed at a wholesome hour. He passed his days on horseback or on foot in his fields; he bought at a high price and sold at a low one; and gave every promise of becoming a gentleman-farmer with results only slightly more disastrous than usual. He had plenty of method (which, indeed, he flattered himself was his strong point), but it was not of the right sort; experience was wanting to him, and he purchased it—like everything else he wanted—dearly. But to the loving eyes that were looking further for him than into his yearly balance sheet the experiment was answering admirably, when a misfortune occurred that crushed the budding hope.

Lucy herself was taken ill.

The fact of playing so long to a very unappreciative audience had tried her nerves in many ways; even Richard's love, which, to do him justice, never flagged, was insufficient to support her under such adverse circumstances, and, indeed, was in itself a source of weakness, since but for it her devotion to him might have been less, as also the fears she entertained upon his account. It is a true saying that it is not work but worry which kills men, and the same holds good as regards women. She could have done anything, dared anything, for her husband's sake, but the feverish apprehension of his coming ruin,

though it did not palsy her energies, consumed her strength. And her strength was not now what it had been. She bore about with her another life, the existence of which was already an anxiety to her. Hitherto she had had to face the future only as regarded Richard himself; but she had now to consider—to make provision for—the future of Richard's child. In her own mind she was convinced that the babe with which Heaven was about to bless her, as other wives would have termed it, would be born to an inheritance of Ruin. To Lucy, the game-keeper's step-daughter, the prospect of poverty for her child may seem to some to have had nothing abnormal or alarming about it; but her love for her husband had so transformed her, that she beheld life, as it were, through his eyes—the eyes, alas! he would not himself use aright, and felt keenly for him the humiliation and disgrace to which he himself was comparatively indifferent. It was Leonard Greene's opinion, and he knew his friend well, that Richard would never become alive to the peril of his position till it was too late; that he would never cease, in short, to squander his money till he had not a shilling left to spend.

The loss on his farm was a mere flea-bite as compared with his other channels of expenditure; for “of the making of books,” says the preacher, “there is no end,” and this is especially true in the case of those who make betting books.

Though he never confessed to it, save by a playful reference to “his having come rather a cropper over the Biennial,” or his “not having found Epsom quite such a good thing as he had expected,” Lucy was convinced that her husband was pursuing the same road to ruin on which he had started long before their marriage; and that all her efforts to save him were labor in vain. Most of us have been acquainted with cases where the poor wife tries to stop the huge gap of her husband's extravagances with little economies here and there, which would be ridiculous in their inefficacy but for the motive that prompts them; but Lucy had made use of no such endeavors, for she had felt their futility from the first. She had tried a better way; she had attempted a revolution in her husband's habits, and she had failed.

If Mr. Lucker had had ten times the skill with which the county credited him, he would have been unable to lay his finger on what was amiss with the mistress of the Tower, because he was unaware of these facts. He only knew that her constitution had suddenly broken down. It was an unusual thing to happen to one in her condition, and a very grave one. There were certain indications in connection with the brain which alarmed him, and after a week of continuous attendance, and in the face of Richard's feverish anxiety, he shrunk from the responsibility that devolved upon him, and advised “another opinion.” The same doctor who had been sent for to Richard's father came down from town, and on this occasion so far differed from his *compère* as to alter the patient's treatment.

His prescription was, “Let her mother be sent for.”

Richard trembled as he heard it, thinking what this man's fiat had been in his father's case, and how the fact had confirmed it. But the physi-

cian bade him be of good courage. "Your wife is in no danger of her life," he said; "she requires change, and, above all, such companionship as a mother alone can give."

Richard would have telegraphed for his foster-mother on the instant, but Lucy resolutely opposed this step. "My mother cannot come here," was her quiet but firm assertion.

Richard understood her at once, and mentally consigned the whole "neighborhood" to a warmer and less watery climate than that of Norfolk.

"Then you must go to *her*, Lucy," he said.

She resisted even this alternative, but it was now Richard's turn to be resolute.

"If you will not go," he answered, "she shall come to fetch you."

And in the end (as always) he had his way.

"After all," as Lucy said to herself, "what does it matter, even though we do go to London? My poor Dick will gamble wherever he is."

And the doctor had judged rightly, so far as he could judge in the dark; for she really did pine for her mother's company.

So Richard ran up to town and took for his wife what the advertisement called a "bijou residence" in one of the streets out of Park Lane. It was well furnished, but that, of course, was not sufficient for its new tenant (male). He spent a thousand pounds or so in fitting it up as he thought Lucy would like it; and to this gilded cage carried his sick bird to be folded under the maternal wing.

The change seemed to afford her immediate benefit; and to all superficial observers (among whom her husband himself was to be reckoned) had, with her health, recovered her spirits. Leonard Greene, however, who knew the cause of her anxieties, was not deceived; and when in due time his friend made some laughing mention to him of the approaching arrival of an heir to the house of Talbot, he uttered the words which had long been on the tip of his tongue.

"I do hope, Talbot," said he, in that light way with which even his most serious thoughts was always clothed, "that this prodigy will have something to inherit besides his parents' virtues."

"Inherit? Well, he won't be rich, you know; I am afraid I have kicked down a farm or two." (A Gargantuan expression for the sale of land.) "But then I have often heard you say that it was a misfortune for a young fellow to have too much money."

"It is worse, however, for him to have none," observed the other, dryly. "Bad for a boy, and much worse for a delicate woman like Mrs. Talbot."

"We are not beggars yet, my dear fellow," answered Richard, carelessly, but with a blush that betrayed even more than the succeeding sentence. "I have been extravagant, no doubt; but what helps to keep me short is a certain charge upon the estate which is a family secret."

This news astonished Mr. Greene, and he looked grave enough, not because of the secret, however, but because of Richard's reference to his being already "short"—which he rightly judged could not have occurred to one in his position unless things had gone very, very far indeed.

"Of course, it is not my business, old fellow; and I know I am pressing the privilege of an old friend to its extreme limit; but I would remind

you that you are not now alone in the world. You have sometimes admonished me concerning my freethinking opinions, but you know it is stated in the Bible that a man who does not make provision for his wife and children is 'worse than an infidel.' The text has reference, it is supposed, to a marriage settlement."

"You don't say so!" said Dick, simply. "Well, I made no settlement; Lucy would not hear of such a thing."

"You can make one without her hearing of it, Talbot."

"True; I'll think about it. There is a pair of horses to be sold at Tattersall's this morning, if you will drive round with me; but there, you don't know a horse from a handsaw;" and off he walked, a little out of humor.

"I know an ass when I see him," sighed Mr. Greene to himself, for he knew the value of Dick's "I'll think about it."

It was creditable in Leonard Greene to venture upon any subject that was distasteful to another, because it was always twice as distasteful to himself; but this rebuff did not prevent him from recurring to the matter. Only this time he made his appeal elsewhere—to Lucy herself.

Her position, so brilliant as it looked, so pitiful as it was—her bright smile, with the heavy care behind it, had touched his heart, and he was resolved to save her from the coming ruin if it should be possible. Some fresh act of extravagance on her husband's part—for which he had not long to wait—gave him the desired opportunity, and he seized it.

"Dick will never be old," he said, "if he lives to be a thousand."

"No. He wears the yoke of matrimony as if it were a flower," answered Lucy, gayly. "No one can accuse me of having crushed him."

"The yoke is light to bear in his case, Mrs. Talbot; but I wish he would think a little more of his responsibilities."

Lucy's face darkened: "I have nothing to complain of in my husband, Mr. Greene."

"Of course not; it is I who complain of him, as the friend of both of you. Pray don't be angry with me. It is no fault of his, only there has been a certain omission in his arrangements for the future that I would venture to speak about, and the more so because I know it has not struck you. May I say one word on a mere matter of business?"

"Business? I am the last person in the world, my dear Mr. Greene, to understand such a thing."

"True; but the very first who ought to understand it. One word from you to your husband would, I am sure, set right a matter that concerns you most nearly, and which is very, very far from right at present."

Lucy's face was paler than it had been in days of yore, and it now grew paler yet.

"I am sure that whatever you may have to say will be dictated by kindness, Mr. Greene," she said. "I found out that quite early when I brought you out at the Imperial. But I cannot hear anything that imputes blame to my husband."

"Not blame, dear Mrs. Talbot; he has only made a mistake, which the expression of a wish on your part would cause him to rectify. He has made no marriage settlement."

"He did right," she said, coldly; "I brought him nothing, and I could accept of nothing."

"You are speaking of the past," he said; "I am looking to the future."

"And I also, Mr. Greene. I look at nothing else." Her voice trembled a little as she said these words, but grew firm again as she added, "I thank you from my heart for your good intentions, but the matter to which you refer is one on which I alone can be the judge."

Her tone precluded the possibility of further discussion, and, after a few commonplaces, Mr. Greene took his leave. His reflections were identical with those awakened by his late interview with Richard, only no man, even to himself, ever calls a pretty woman an ass. "This is midsummer madness," was his thought on this occasion. "To a false and absurd sense of obligation to her husband, she is about to sacrifice herself and her unborn babe. The poor soul thinks she can support all three by her singing!"

CHAPTER XLIX.

A CATASTROPHE.

It is difficult—very difficult—to find a test that shall be indisputable of a good husband. A man may be very "domestic," and all the worse for it; or "devoted," and yet desperately jealous; he may be kind and indulgent, and yet careless of his wife's health, or how he taxes it; or he may be a "model husband"—whose attractions are often found too great to be resisted by his neighbor's spouse. There is nothing certain to be gathered of the real merits of a Benedict from this or that attribute; but perhaps the best test—if test there be—is to watch his behavior during that cheerless time when his wife is engaged in the cares and pleasures of maternity; when his baby cries, but does not crow; when his home is in a state of "hush," and the exercise of hospitality becomes impossible; when visitors have come with "kind inquiries," but never expect to be asked to dinner.

Judged by this standard, Richard Talbot, on and after the arrival of his son and heir, must be pronounced one of the best of husbands. He was affectionately solicitous, without being fidgety or troublesome in his anxieties; he was so constant in his attendance on the invalid that the monthly nurse allowed him to be quite an exception to the wicked "sect"—as she called it—to which he belonged; he had no objections to holding the baby when that lady offered him that privilege; and, in short, he won golden opinions as a husband and a father on all hands. Perhaps folks praised him more because they had not looked to him for such virtues. Even Mrs. Parkes was what is called "agreeably surprised" by the domestic behavior of her foster-son and son-in-law. If Lucy herself was surprised, she did not say so, though she was far from taking these proofs of Richard's devotion as a matter of course. Notwithstanding her anxieties, this was perhaps the happiest time of her married life. It was pleasant to her to receive such assurances of her husband's love; for though she had never doubted of it, she had prepared herself for certain omissions, shortcomings—what ill-natured friends perhaps would have called "neglect"—on the

part of one so careless and so fond of pleasure; whereas, so far from neglecting her, her Richard was more than ever kind and attentive. Then her boy—as she called her infant of a few inches—was a source of inexpressible bliss to her, and not the less because she had persuaded herself that it bore quite a remarkable likeness to its father. Even to this statement (though the child was mottled like his contemporaries, and had the usual blob for a nose) Richard listened without disclaimer.

The admiration of grandmamma for this object of worship seemed to redouble, too, Lucy's affection for her mother; and thus lapped in love and glory, the young mother began slowly to recover strength. Perhaps the crowning moment of her happiness was when Lady Earnshaw came to call upon her with a coral, with silver bells, as a present for her great-grandson. They had a long conversation together, and when they parted, the old lady, ere she rose from her chair by Lucy's sofa, bent down and kissed her.

"When the worst comes to the worst, my dear, you may count on me to be your friend," she said, little knowing what "the worst" was to be. And it was nearer even than she expected.

Everybody—that is, "all whom it concerned," and many others—knew by this time that Richard Talbot had nearly come to the end of his tether; that the estate at Durnton Regis was deeply "dipped;" that he had tried his hand at every device for spending money; and had been very successful in all. Very few persons pitied him, which was scarcely to be wondered at, since he had not yet begun to pity himself; and still fewer pitied Lucy. "It was," said the more respectable portion of society, "just what such a woman deserved."

She had set her trap for the heir of Talbot Tower, and had caught him. And much good it had done her. She would probably soon disgrace the family by reappearing on the stage.

This was hard, since they allowed that if she did so it would be for the sake of keeping the family in bread-and-cheese. Even "the more respectable portion of society" is, however, sometimes hard, though it must be added, in justice to them, that they were, in this case, naturally annoyed with Lucy. They had predicted that she would run through the remnant of her husband's money, and then run away with somebody else; whereas she had been notoriously economical in her own expenditure, and her marriage had been, domestically speaking, a happy one.

Whatever might be her husband's straits, and notwithstanding she must have known that his profusion still continued, Mrs. Talbot now seemed to have regained her spirits. She had quite recovered her old health and strength, and was no longer depressed and care-worn as she had been at Durnton. Those who knew her best, and her circumstances, were the most astonished at this. Some thought that she had grown reckless of the future; others that she had become philosophic; others, again, that, with her darling babe and her devoted husband, she had made a Fool's Paradise for herself, and shut her eyes to facts and the future.

The first time she reappeared at the dinner-table Leonard Greene was present: Richard, al-

ways desirous to make a gala-day, would have invited half a dozen people, but Mrs. Parkes had the power of veto, and exercised it. It seemed to the guest that he had never seen his hostess more beautiful, and what gave him a still greater pleasure, more gay and cheerful. The baby appeared with the dessert—its father's offer of grapes and peaches being declined with scorn by the young gentleman, and hailed with ridicule by the rest of the company; the infant's health was drank in the most unexceptionable claret, and replied to by Mr. Greene on his behalf in a speech that convulsed the little audience. It was a domestic scene, which that gentleman could not help reflecting might be "worked up" admirably for the stage; but apart from that touch of professional feeling, he himself, as the friend of the family, was conscious of adding to its domesticity; he was, as it were, part of the local coloring; he could not help reflecting that the materials of genuine happiness were in those about him, and would remain there, whatever misfortune Fate might have in store for them. As Mrs. Talbot was under orders to retire early, the gentlemen accompanied the ladies into the drawing-room, where Richard begged for just one song. It was the first time that Lucy had touched the piano for some weeks—a great deprivation to her—and she took her seat at it very readily.

That scene remained long impressed on the mind of one of its beholders. The pale young mother with the flush of pleasure upon her delicate cheeks; her thin fingers, with their costly jewels (for Richard liked to see his gifts upon them), taking their preparatory canter over the keys; the attentive little audience eager to hear and to applaud. The notes of the instrument were evoked as usual, but when those of the voice began to play their part, it was plain that there was something amiss. Again and again the singer essayed her art, but something—not strength, alas! but the power of expression—appeared to fail her. Suddenly, no song, but a wild, passionate cry of despair and woe came from her beautiful lips, and she fell backward into her mother's arms.

"My God! what is it?" exclaimed Richard, frantically.

"She has fainted," replied Mrs. Parkes. "She has a little overtaxed her strength."

They carried her into her room, and, after a few minutes, she came to herself. Leonard Greene did not leave the house till the doctor had been sent for, and made his report. His opinion coincided with that of Mrs. Parkes.

"We have been getting on a little too fast," was his verdict. With a highly nervous temperament like that of Mrs. Talbot, it was impossible to be too careful; and music was a very exciting cause, etc., etc.

Mr. Greene walked home with this gentleman, and, as a friend of the family, put a question or two to him, which were answered frankly enough. Mrs. Talbot, he affirmed, would be herself again in a few days.

"But her singing?" observed Mr. Greene. "It seemed to me that there was something organically wrong."

"It is possible: the whole constitution under these circumstances sometimes undergoes a change; and, of course, therefore, portions of it—the greater includes the less."

"But her voice?" reiterated Mr. Greene.

"I think it quite possible that her voice has suffered. It is a sad thing if it be so; but then many worse things happen to us: I mean that it cannot materially signify to a lady in Mrs. Talbot's position whether she can compass certain notes or not."

"But do you really mean to say that it is doubtful whether, even with growing strength, her vocal powers will return to her?"

"Well, yes, sir. It is my opinion that Mrs. Talbot will never sing again."

CHAPTER L.

GIVEN OVER.

DOCTORS—whom I hold above all professional men in reverence, as being wiser than most others, because of their human experience, and kinder than any—labor, as a general rule, under this grave mistake; they underrate the importance, *i. e.*, to their patients, of all such diseases as are not fatal. It is a libel to represent them as careless of the material circumstances of their patients; the better class of them do not recommend Tokay to feeble curates, or Madeira (that is, the island) to the editors of London newspapers, but they estimate too lightly the smaller evils to which flesh is heir. They don't know how severe a punishment they inflict when they tell the man of action he must "lie up for a month or two," or the man of letters that he must "take a long holiday."

A little thought would often remedy these errors, since, if they would only take the trouble to put themselves into their patient's place, it is certain they would sometimes reconsider their sentence. It would have been impossible, however, for the doctor who said "Mrs. Talbot will never sing again," to have pictured to himself the gravity of his dictum, and the more especially since his patient made no sign when it was communicated to her. She only bowed and closed her eyes, which he attributed to physical weakness that had made her indifferent to most matters. If he could have seen her a few minutes later, when, after dismissing her mother, on pretense of needing repose, she lay alone in her room, with her white face turned to the wall, he would have taken "another view" of the case; he might even have feared, perhaps, for the life of the babe that lay locked in her arms, but which seemed to her despairing soul less a comfort than a curse. For the one hope of its future, and of hers, was crushed within her.

Leonard Greene's sagacity had not deceived him when it convinced him, long ago, that Lucy had persuaded herself that, when all was gone and spent, she might support her husband and her babe by her own exertions; that "when the worst came to the worst," as Lady Earnshaw had phrased it, she would not need to be indebted to her, or any one, for the bread of charity, but would be enabled to provide that at least, and, as she fondly hoped, far more, by the exercise of her vocal skill. It is probable that she overrated its merits, but there were circumstances, though she herself would have been loth to take them into account, which would, without doubt, have assisted her efforts.

As the wife of ruined Richard Talbot, she would have attracted audiences who would never have come to listen to mere Madame Lucinda. But, now her voice was gone, she had nothing of attraction left; and her Richard, and his babe, and she must starve together.

Of course it will be asked why, in the name of common-sense, did she not, in this hour of despair and woe, appeal to Richard himself. He had money yet—what some persons would still call a fortune. It would be surely possible to convince even him that they stood—she knew not how near, but not very far from the brink of ruin. And even if he were so mad as to still close his eyes to the gulf that yawned for them, would he not do for her sweet sake—he had refused her nothing yet—what he would not do for his own? 'Though deaf to the voice of reason and of conscience, he would surely listen to her piteous pleading. But in the first place (which puts reason out of court), Lucy was a woman; and in the second, she was proud, with a pride beyond the pride of all the Talbots. If he would not pause in his mad career of extravagance and waste for his own sake, she would not compel him to do so for the sake of her and hers. But for them, even as it was, he might have gone on longer—perhaps years longer—in the path that he had chosen for himself: and it was not for her to curtail his pleasures. Hopeless and helpless, she passed an hour in thoughts that idly chased one another like clouds along a wintry sky, and then—one having at last taken a defined shape and form—Lucy Talbot became another woman.

Bear with her, reader, though no others did, while you read the conclusion of her history, for the tale is a true one.

"I have not disturbed you, Lucy?" said Mrs. Parkes, entering the room in her noiseless manner (she was the perfection of a nurse). "You are better for your little nap, however, short as it has been, I see."

"Yes, I am better; indeed, I feel quite well. There was a certain hardness in her tone which might have struck a more sensitive ear than that which it addressed, but Mrs. Parkes only remarked to herself that her daughter's voice was firmer than it had been for many a day, and her face less pale—for it wore the vigorous hue of resolution.

"I shall drive the new ponies in the Park for an hour, mother."

"Thé new ponies! and you have been only three times out in the carriage, propped with cushions. It will be madness, Lucy!"

"On the contrary, I feel that a little excitement will do me good."

She rang the bell, and gave her orders accordingly.

"But I understood, my darling, you were not going to keep the ponies; that you thought them a useless piece of extravagance, and scolded Master Richard—I mean Mr. Talbot—for buying such a present."

"Did I? Well, I've changed my mind. It is the privilege of an invalid, you know," added she, with a gentleness that contrasted strangely with the abruptness of her previous speech. "You have always spoiled me, mother, and now I am going to spoil myself."

It was a strange speech, but Mrs. Parkes was accustomed to her daughter's modes of expres-

sion, which, like her ways, were not those of ordinary young women. She was as much surprised as Richard, however, and by no means as agreeably so, when she heard Lucy ask her husband to take her to the opera the next night, and express a wish that she possessed a box there. She thought it very curious that her daughter should like to hear the opera singers, just after she had been told by the doctor that in all probability she herself would never sing again; and, moreover, she lamented that Lucy should encourage her husband in any habit of extravagance—for she well knew (as indeed took place) that he would straightway engage a box for her for the season. And this, alas! was only the beginning of a new order of things, wherein Lucy, instead of endeavoring to control his profusion, really appeared to spur him on to acts of lavish expenditure. He never dreamed of refusing her anything, and took genuine pleasure in gratifying her new-born taste for splendor; nor did it ever occur to him—as it did to others—that Lucy's freaks and fancies were almost exclusively of a selfish sort; that she now not only took pleasure in the most costly wearing apparel, but in the purchase of gems and jewels to an extent which would have been improvident even had Richard's original fortune been intact. There was no limit, in fact, to her self-indulgence in this respect, and what was worse, it gradually became whispered abroad that Mrs. Richard Talbot had been bitten by the same dog that had bitten her husband—that she had become a gambler on the turf. It was certain, at all events, that she received very large sums from him by check, and was yet constantly overdrawing the private account that he had established for her, at her own request, at his banker's.

Behavior of this sort in the circle in which the Talbots moved takes a considerable time to become talked about; yet it was now quite an ordinary topic among the gossips of the young couple's acquaintance. Some said that it was no wonder that the poor woman had taken to such ways, since gambling, like drinking, is a catching complaint; and others excused her for enjoying herself while she could, since her time was obviously short; and, indeed, it was surprising to many how Talbot had contrived to "carry on," with so much sail set, so long as he had. Those who knew Mrs. Richard Talbot best, however—namely, her mother and Mr. Leonard Greene—took a different view of the case. They were well convinced, notwithstanding the whirl of gayety in which she now lived by choice, that Lucy was not enjoying herself; that under that bright smile and airy manner of hers dull care sat brooding. They deemed the change in her habits to have been induced by sheer despair, and that she plunged in gayety, in hopes, poor soul, to find beneath its sparkling shallows the jewel self-forgetfulness. If popularity and adulation could have secured it for her, it would have been hers, for she was grown more beautiful than ever, and no longer restrained, but rather encouraged, the admiration she excited. Only, unlike some other idols of Fashion, she did not ignore her husband or neglect her child. Upon this point, and upon this point only, was Mr. Greene able to report favorably of Lucy to Lady Earnshaw, who had privately sent for him to Gresham Street.

"I like the woman," she had said to him; "I have done what I can for her, and I would fain do more. But what I hear of her present conduct is shameful. To think—after all her expressions of sorrow about poor Dick, and her promises to do her best for his amendment—that she should be spurring him thus upon the road to ruin. The whole town is ringing with her extravagance."

"Her conduct is as unaccountable to me," answered Mr. Greene, sadly, "as it is to you, madam. But I know that a short time back she had a severe mental shock, which has made her in some sort, to my mind, unaccountable for her actions."

"There is a great deal of method in her madness," answered Lady Earnshaw, dryly. "I heard the other day from my own jeweller that she does as much business in gold as in gems; that she sells as well as buys; and, in short, I have my suspicions that she is making a purse for herself against the time when the crash comes, and poor Dick is a beggar."

"I am quite sure you wrong her there, madam," answered Mr. Greene, confidently. "I had hoped you had taken a more just view of Mrs. Talbot's character. It is an independent one, indeed, but in quite another sense than that which you have suggested." And then he told her how she had put trust in her voice when all else should fail, and how *that* had failed her in his presence.

"That was very sad," answered Lady Earnshaw, softening; "still, your view of the case is irreconcilable with her present behavior. What excuse does she give you for it?"

"To me, madam, none; why should she? I perceive that she avoids me, and has done so from the time of which I speak, which is also the date of her change of conduct."

"Then she is at least ashamed of herself."

"Indeed, madam, I cannot judge."

"That is to say, you will not. Here is a clever man, and, I will add, an 'indifferent honest' one, who dare not speak his mind about a crime because the offender is a pretty woman. And yet Father Vane, as he calls himself, is always drumming into my poor niece's ear that beauty is vain, and youth a shadow. For my part, I believe your sex worships naught else."

These were the first words of harshness, of the philosophic sort, that Mr. Greene had ever heard her speak; but it revealed to him the root of bitterness within her. He pitied this poor lady, who had thrown her love away, first upon a worthless husband, and then upon a spendthrift boy, with all his heart.

"I have never been an admirer of my sex," he answered, gravely; "and the study of my own character, I am sorry to say, does not give me a better opinion of them. Still, in this case, I believe my judgment is not swayed by personal feelings."

"You think, then, this woman is justified in flinging away poor Dick's last thousands, and upon herself too?"

"I do not say justified, but I think despair excuses much. She has tried every way to restrain her husband, and every way has failed. When hope has utterly deserted a shipwrecked crew, they will anticipate their certain doom by eating up all their rations."

This was a plea of justification which entered into but few minds, and was accepted seriously by none save Mr. Greene. All respectable persons had but one opinion of Mrs. Richard Talbot's new-born love of splendor and excess, and it was a bad one. Among these, however, I do not, of course, include the world of Fashion, who, with some few exceptions, are under any circumstances very ready to admit into their ranks a young couple who live at the rate of twenty thousand a year, and are, besides, possessed of personal attractions. Mrs. Richard Talbot, with her beauty and her diamonds, with her gayety and her equipages, and, above all, with her charming little dinners (which had few rivals), was become quite the rage in London. Only Mayfair rather resented her fidelity to that soft-headed young fellow her husband, and was out of patience with that little wretch of a baby of hers, whose most trifling indisposition would sometimes cause her to absent herself from the best society, and even to put off some entertainment promised to it at her own home.

As to those who might be supposed to retain any real regard for the young couple, they were utterly shocked and scandalized with this young woman's proceedings. Sister Edith wept in secret (not, indeed, for Lucy, but for Richard), and took but little comfort from the fact that certain remorseful scruples as to not having acknowledged Lucy as her relative were now utterly swept away by that young person's conduct. It was clear that she had been right, and her aunt wrong, in the view she had taken of the match, from the very first, but her gentle spirit would have far preferred that the event had proved her own judgment harsh, and justified Lady Earnshaw's charity.

As to the Durnton folks, they were jubilant over the coming catastrophe, so far as Lucy was concerned, though a certain pity was not wanting to them as respected Richard. The very woods about the Tower were growing bare; field after field, and farm after farm, had been cloven from the estate; and they regretted, in a vague, sentimental way, that the old house of Talbot would never again hold up its head among them. It was dreadful to think that some self-made man, without forefathers or h's, would doubtless presently come to live in the ancestral seat; but, on the other hand, it had long remained useless to them for all neighborly purposes, and the younger members at least of the families around would have been very willing to see a lawn tennis-court upon the Terrace, and garden-parties, and balls at the Tower in their proper seasons. Upon the whole, since ruin must needs come, the sooner that abominable young woman (who was now credited with the whole of it) should bring it about, the better for all parties.

Perhaps Mr. Freeman was a solitary exception to these opinions of "the county," but if he had any shred of pity left for Lucy, he kept it to himself; it is certain, at all events, that he did not confide it to the wife of his bosom.

CHAPTER LI.

THE SECRET OUT.

"TIME and the hour," says the poet, "live through the longest day," and eventually, though in most cases at a somewhat later date than has been fixed by his deploring friends, the spend-thrift comes to the end of his fortune. In Richard Talbot's case the ending had always been a question of time from the moment that he had been in a position to do what he pleased with his own, and it would have been so had his fortune been originally twice or ten times as large. To endow him with wealth was to put water in a sieve; but still the water had dribbled through during those first years, whereas, at last, when his wife had begun to help him, it was poured out, as though the sieve had been a mere hoop. It was wonderful to those who watched the splendor of her career, which threw that former one of her husband quite into the shade, that Dick's money should have lasted so long. It came to an end at last, however, and very suddenly: he galloped on in his usual reckless fashion till he was brought up by a fence too high to be cleared even by his famous timber-taker, Credit (out of Expectation)—namely, the "bullfinch," No Effects.

It presented itself to him, after all, a little unexpectedly, and, as it were, second-hand; that is to say, it was Lucy who drew his attention to it.

They were sitting at breakfast one morning rather late after a post-opera ball; the table loaded with dainties, for which they had small appetite; the room a garden of flowers. On Richard's side of the table was a large heap of letters, the handwriting of most of which he knew, and therefore had no intention of opening them; he was tired of that monotonous beginning of "To account rendered." Lucy, too, had her little pile of letters, but her attention was for the most part given to the infant Dick, who, cradled in a comfortable arm-chair, was babbling of green fields, or other evidently agreeable topic, in his unintelligible ripple. It was like the breakfast scene from "The Rake's Progress," with a touch of domesticity added which did not make it less pathetic.

"My dear Dick," said Lucy, presently, in a complaining voice, "what does *this* mean? Mr. Gewgaw declines to send me my diamonds."

She threw a note across the table, which her husband glanced at with an indifferent air.

"I suppose the man wants the money," replied he, quietly, "before he parts with his goods. I should close my account with Gewgaw, and go to somebody else."

"Yes; but before closing one's account, it is necessary to settle it," observed Lucy, dryly. "I thought perhaps you could let me have a thousand pounds."

"My darling, I am afraid I haven't got a thousand pence." He smiled even as he said that, and it was not a bitter smile—it was tender, yet very grave.

"You are joking, Dick; you *must* be joking," said Lucy, with an aggrieved air. "You mean that you are short at your banker's."

"Yes, I mean that, undoubtedly. But I am also short everywhere else."

"Then sell something—land or stocks, or whatever it is. It is too ridiculous to tell me I can't have a thousand pounds."

"You should have a hundred thousand if I had got it to give you, my pet. But then I haven't got it. One can't get blood out of a stone." And for about the first time in his life Richard Talbot sighed.

"Why on earth should you not sell the Tower? You told me yourself that you should never go back to it again."

"Nor shall I. And for a very good reason, Lucy; it has already passed into other hands."

"What? Have you parted with your patrimony?"

"With every shilling of it. Of course I've been a fool."

Lucy threw up her hands with a gesture that seemed to say, "Fool is no name for you."

"Still, Richard, it cannot be that we are beggars?"

"Well, no, dear; but there is scarcely a shot left in the locker, and that's the truth. Your poor grandmother once told me that I should be the ruin of you. I feel as if I should like to hang myself; only that would be a better fate than I deserve. The hangman ought to do it for me."

Lucy looked away from him and fixed her eyes upon her child.

"Yes, and I've ruined poor little Dick, too," he continued. "I have been a reckless blackguard, Lucy, and deserve all you may think proper to say to me. What a selfish brute I was to marry you—to marry anybody!" He rose from his seat, and began to pace the room with rapid strides.

"How much, Richard, have you really left to live upon?" asked Lucy, presently.

"Nothing—nothing."

"Do you mean to say you don't know where to get even a thousand pounds—for these diamonds?"

"Indeed, my pet, you must now do without diamonds. I have not a stiver left."

Lucy's face was white, but her tone was firm and even hard as she replied, "Have you spent, then, that £9000 I heard you speaking of only the other day to Mr. Inglis?"—Mr. Inglis was his London lawyer. "He said it was out on mortgage."

"I have not spent that, but it is not mine to spend." Here he blushed like a girl, and added, hesitatingly, "That is to say, the interest is due to some one else."

"I don't wish to be inquisitive, Richard," she answered, haughtily. "I have never pried into your secret expenses."

"Lucy, Lucy, you do me wrong," he answered, vehemently. "I have done you grievous harm, but in this matter you are reproaching me unjustly. That money is bespoken for an annuity—"

Lucy's beautiful mouth curled scornfully. "So I conjectured," she said.

"For an annuity to an old friend of my father's," he continued, quietly. "If you do not believe me, I am sorry; but I cannot tell you more—it is a family secret. The man in question—for it is a man—is now fighting for his country against the Germans. I wish I was fighting with him—or against him—so that I might be killed."

"What good would that do little Dick and me?" inquired Lucy, coldly.

"No good, that is true; living or dead, I can be of no good to anybody. Still, when a man is dead he can at least do no more harm."

He looked at her, hoping, perhaps, for a glance of pity, but she was bending over her child.

"You say you have no money, Richard, nor any means of raising any," said she, presently, but still with averted face; "you have doubtless, however, plenty of debts."

"I have no debts, Lucy, that cannot be met; I am sure of that, because, you know, I have always kept account of everything. When I am sold up—which will probably happen in a few weeks or days—everybody will be paid, and there will be a little something—a very little—for you and Dick. I think you may continue, too, to have your mother to live with you. It is a miserable end, of course. Greene told me long ago that I ought to have made a settlement upon you. I would to Heaven I had. I say again I am a selfish blackguard."

"And when you have washed your hands of baby and me," said Lucy, slowly, "what is it you mean to do with yourself?"

"That is the first kind thing you have said, Lucy," answered Dick, in a broken voice. "I did not deserve it, I know; but somehow I did not think—for baby's sake—you would have been so hard upon me."

"It is my baby who makes me hard," answered Lucy.

"Because I have ruined him? Well, that is natural enough, only my selfishness did not allow me to put the matter in that light. I think it is very good of you, Lucy, to express any interest in the future of such a father and such a husband. I have put myself outside the pale of pity."

"You have not told me what you mean to do with yourself."

"Well, since you are so good as to inquire a second time, I mean to write to De Blaise—that is the name of my father's friend—and join him as a volunteer; that is, after I have got my life insured. The premium will be heavy, but I shall take care it is paid but once. I have been making up my mind about that this long time. Little Dick will get £5000 or so in that way."

"Then, do you mean to say you have been living in this reckless way for years, with Death before your eyes?"

"Well, yes. I could not help spending money. If I had it all again to-morrow, it would all go the same way. When I was a bachelor it didn't signify. But lately—after Dick was born—I made up my mind how it was to end."

"Madman! And since then you have been more extravagant than ever!"

"Well, come, Lucy, and so have you. I am not going to reproach you—Heaven forbid. I was always glad to see you enjoying yourself, at any cost; I never grudged you. But during this last year you have spent a fortune."

"Of course you have given me a good deal of money," she answers, carelessly; "but then I have been so unlucky in my speculations."

"And they were rather large, my dear. You know I keep an account of all these things, though I take such little heed about them. From first to last, darling—here he took out his little ledger—"you have had fourteen thousand pounds."

"I have, Richard; but it is not all spent." She rose from her knees beside her babe, and went to her desk. "I did not like to put it in the bank; I thought it would be safer here. Here are twelve thousand pounds of it."

"Twelve thousand pounds!" ejaculated Richard. "Why, you must have recouped yourself for everything at Ascot."

"I never won or lost a shilling, Richard. I never bought a jewel that I did not sell again. Whatever money you gave me I kept—or as much of it as I could without exciting suspicion. I knew that you would ruin us; as you have just said yourself, it was not in your nature to avoid it. So I kept this against the rainy day. You must forgive me, Richard, since it was for your sake."

"You mean for baby's sake."

"Certainly not; the money is yours. I only hold it, as it were, in trust for you."

Richard, who was standing by her as she displayed the roll of notes—a fortune in a nutshell—here clasped her in his arms.

"You are an angel, Lucy, as certainly as I am the other thing."

She did not, however, return his embrace.

"You had better take the notes, Richard, and count them," said she, gravely. "The amount is rather over twelve thousand pounds, and will last you as many months."

"Thank you," said Richard, "but it shall last longer."

He walked to the bell and rang it. "Take a cab, and go to Mr. Inglis, the lawyer," said he to the servant, "and bring him back with you at once."

"What is it you mean to do?" inquired Lucy, her voice trembling for the first time.

"I mean—but don't let me see it, don't let me finger it—to settle the money, at once—within half an hour—upon you and Dick."

"But, Richard, you can never live upon the interest of £12,000."

"Then I can get shot by the Germans, as originally intended," was his cool reply. "Please lock that desk, and give me a cigar."

Before the cigar was finished the lawyer arrived.

"Take that key, Inglis," said Richard, "out of my wife's hand, and keep it as the apple of your eye; and then take my instructions." It was astonishing to see how quiet, and resolute, and business-like this young fellow had suddenly become. In a few minutes the draft of a deed had been written out, by which "bread-and-cheese, at least," as Richard modestly termed it, were secured for Mrs. Talbot and little Dick for their natural lives, and a provision made for certain contingencies. Even then he refused to leave the house till the deed itself was drawn up and witnessed, and in the mean time despatched a messenger for Leonard Greene, who, with Mr. Inglis himself, was to be the trustee for the carrying out of his good intentions.

It was not without some embarrassment that Mr. Greene presented himself, for he had been a stranger to his friend's roof for many a day by reason of Mrs. Talbot's obvious disinclination for his society; and Richard's first words were by no means calculated to set him at ease.

"I have sent for you this morning, Pussy," he said, "to act for us in a business capacity. You wished me, many months ago, to make a settle-

ment upon my wife and child; and I am now going to follow your advice. The reckless expenditure and lavish extravagance in which Lucy has indulged of late, have alone enabled me to make this most necessary provision."

Greene thought for a moment that the long-expected stroke of ruin had fallen at last, and driven Dick mad. But he looked from him to Lucy, and her expression of face at once reassured him; the tears were stealing down her pale cheeks; but he saw they were not those of woe; her eyes were glowing through them with love, and pride, and happiness.

"She has been most confoundedly extravagant," continued Dick, who had by this time quite recovered his airy tone. "But then you would not believe what that woman has *saved* during the last year or so."

Then a light began to dawn on Greene's quick wits. "She has been saving it for *you*, you good-for-nothing fellow," cried he, excitedly. "I thought that she must have had some good reason for what she did."

"And that, I suppose," said Dick—"goodness being naturally hateful to you—is why you never came near us."

Here Mr. Greene became all sorts of colors.

"It was my fault that Mr. Greene did not come," interposed Lucy, softly. "I did not wish that one of the few persons who, I flattered myself, had some good opinion of me, should—should—be compelled to witness—what must have seemed to him—very deplorable behavior on my part."

"It did not," asserted Mr. Greene; "that is, I always said that you were not to blame."

"Then you must have had to defend me very often," said Lucy, naively. "Of course it was sad to feel what everybody—whose opinion was worth having—must needs think of me. But I had no other way to save dear Dick."

"That's true," assented Richard, confidently; "if she had not spent the money, or seemed to spend it—why, I should have really spent it, you see. I should spend it now if it was not locked up."

"I did not ask him to lock it up," said Lucy, earnestly.

"There spoke the sex all over," laughed Mr. Greene. "I never supposed you capable, dear Mrs. Talbot, of taking such a precaution on your own account; one should not put one's self under an obligation, even to one's husband, you know."

Lucy blushed at having her own opinion thus repeated to her, but blushed still more when Dick observed, with tender gravity,

"You are wrong for once, Pussy, in your reading of human nature. My wife did not tell you that she had not asked me to make a settlement, to show her own resolution. She told you in order that you might understand that I, Richard Talbot, did for once forget self so far as to insist upon her reaping the benefit of her own self-denial and ingenuity; if I had touched one shilling of that sacred store, I should have deserved to go to the devil here and hereafter; but she wishes you to believe that I have done quite a noble action."

For once the eyes of the lover and the husband *had looked deeper* than those of the philosophic observer; for this was the very thing that Lucy *had meant*.

CHAPTER LII.

CONCLUSION.

Of course few people ever heard, and still fewer ever believed, the story of Lucy Talbot's pretending to be a spendthrift. When her husband took a farm in the country, and set to work to make a living out of it (in which, after a time, he was partially successful), that was miracle enough for his friends; when he came up to town for the cattle show, and some of them saw him looking with interest at the agricultural implements, they could hardly give credence to their own eyes. It was not to be expected that they should take on credit any marvels respecting his wife. It was easier to imagine that the Dick Talbot they had known of old, and who had taken to fat pigs and steam-plooughs, had also suddenly emancipated himself by a great effort from his habits of excess, and pulled up on the brink of ruin just in time. It was a reformation of character that happens only to one in a million, and which in his case had to be carried out in the teeth of a wife he doted upon, and who was herself the most extravagant of hussies. It was true that Dick always told everybody the true history of the matter, and with great pride, and then Dick was a *farceur*, and loved his joke. Mankind, and especially womankind, were as difficult to be persuaded of the actual facts as any unsuccessful rhymester of the good taste of the public.

This scepticism, of which Dick was fortunately ignorant, Lucy thoroughly understood, but suffered nothing from it. She had been too long accustomed to a state of isolation, and of late to a life with a purpose in it, to be moved by the opinion of the crowd.

Those she lived for—her husband and her child—repaid what she had done for them by their love, and this more than required her for everything.

And yet as time drew on, Lucy Talbot began to be "accepted," and even appreciated in certain quarters. Before they left their little house in Mayfair (which was as soon as they could dispose of the lease), she had several visitors—one a Sister of Charity, the announcement of whose arrival by the servant set her heart beating with a glow of pride. She knew that Richard had been to Gresham Street, and she guessed that Sister Edith had come to own that her nephew's wife did not quite deserve the harsh judgment she had passed upon her. But it was not Edith, but Margaret Pole, who now lived with her, and shared her labors among the poor.

Hers was one of those curious cases which are not explicable by the usual formulas, and which, therefore, outraged common-sense—that is, the sense of commonplace people. Miss Pole was not ugly, nor was she old, nor had she been "got at" by priests, and yet she had vowed herself (though without the vow) to Heaven. There was no means of accounting for it in any reasonable way; though to be sure some people said that she had always been in love with Mrs. Talbot's husband. Perhaps her long tendance of her sick grandfather, with contemplation in the watches of the night of what came of a life of self-indulgence, had had its part in persuading her to abjure the pleasures of this world; and certainly the old squire had had a strange influence over her, alive and dead. This, among

other things, had happened in connection with him. He had been deprived, as we have said, by paralysis, of the use of his limbs for months before his death, and one day he had bidden her fetch him a book which lay in his justice-room. "Don't be long, my wench," he had said, for to let her out of his sight had become terrible to him. She had found the book, though not without some delay, and was turning to go up-stairs, when her grandfather himself, in his dressing-gown, and just as she had left him on the sofa of his bedchamber, except that there was a painful look of yearning in his eyes, presented himself to her astonished gaze! "Oh, grandfather!" cried she, and then he vanished. She flew up-stairs; the nurse, who had taken her place by the side of the invalid, was at her post, and of course her patient in his place since he had lost the use of his limbs.

"Mr. Pole has been quite quiet, miss," she whispered: so quiet that he did not even breathe. Walter Pole was a dead man.

This incident, coming on much that had gone before, doubtless had its influence on Margaret; its morbid influence, if you will, since it helped, however irrationally, to make her dead to the world. She remembered, however, that she had lived in it, and had now come to Lucy to express her sorrow for having held aloof from her, and tacitly allied herself with her detractors, during her stay at Durnton.

"Richard told me of your value," she said, simply, "but I was deaf and blind like the rest."

Lady Earnshaw and Edith came together, a few hours afterward, to make, as the former said, their "recantation of error."

It was a happy moment for Lucy, but the interview would have had its embarrassments for her had not her husband come in and relieved her. It was very pleasant to her to see how the two ladies received him, and to feel that they were really devoted to that young prodigal; nor did it wound her *amour propre* in the least that she recognized the fact that she had no standing in their regard whatever, apart from him and her child. These two, however, were hers, and hers only, and she desired the love of no one else for her own sake: her mother and Aunt Susan, whose affections she had never lost, being, of course, excepted.

"Well, Aunt Edith, and what does Father Vane say about us now?" inquired wicked Dick.

"He wishes you all happiness, Richard, and begged me to add, if it could be said without offence or intrusion, that he deeply regrets having expressed opinions about your wife's conduct, which he now perceives were quite unjustifiable."

"I think he likes your wife, Dick, better than you," said Lady Earnshaw, slyly. "This extravagant minx, you see" (here she pinched Lucy's son), "has done evil that good might come, which, of course, wins the approbation of Father Vane. By-the-bye, I am bound to say that Mr. Leonard Greene always defended your wife when I abused her, and yet I don't think you need be jealous of him either. I should be very sorry to believe otherwise, for the fact is I have rather fallen in love with that young gentleman myself."

Mr. Greene, indeed, became quite a link between the ladies of the house in Gresham Street, where he was a constant guest, and the Talbots, whose country house became as much his home as his own lodgings in the Adelphi; his companionship was of the greatest service to poor Dick at times when a certain *mal du pays* made him groan for the pleasant curves of Goodwood and the long green "straight" of Ascot. But these temptations were short, and grew weaker and weaker every year, as other matters occupied their place in his mind; and it must be stated to his honor (for he voluntarily passed his word to that effect) that from the date of "the settlement," Dick never made a single bet. His wicked little ledger was exchanged for a larger one, in which his agricultural accounts were entered with his habitual accuracy of detail. Mrs. Parkes removed with the little family from Mayfair, and still remains in it, the mildest of mothers-in-law; indeed, Mr. Greene, in view of the whole circumstances of the case, has dubbed her "The exception."

A few weeks after the farm was taken, a certain melancholy event took place, which (as such things will do, however inconsistently with the fitness of things) materially added to the well-being of the young couple. De Blaise was killed in action, and the money which Dick had religiously set apart for the fulfilment of his father's wishes became their own. Thus they enjoy no despicable revenue; and what they have, thanks to Lucy's management, Dick swears "goes further" than his old income. He has a hundred a year allowed to him for pocket-money, and was discovered to have saved out of it—half a crown—at the end of the first twelve months.

As for little Dick, he will be sufficiently provided for, as Lady Earnshaw has announced her intention of leaving him all she has to dispose of. In short, if the prosperity belonging to the end of a fairy story does not attend Mr. and Mrs. Talbot, they have a good share of Fortune's favors, and certainly far more than one of them deserves. Dick is quite cognizant of this fact, and never forgets to whom he owes his salvation.

In a letter he wrote to Mr. Freeman respecting business affairs, and which was personally friendly enough, he gave a piece of his mind with respect to the behavior of his Durnton neighbors to Lucy, at the same time expressing what he owed to her. The rector wrote back very graciously, and giving entire credence to Dick's account of the matter, while Mrs. Freeman sent her kindest regards and congratulations.

"What the deuce does she mean by congratulations?" exclaimed Dick. "I suppose she congratulates me upon the possession of such a wife as you, my dear." Lucy laughed, and "thought not," in which she showed her discernment.

There had been considerable discussion upon her merits between the rector and his wife; and they had not agreed, even at last.

"Well," said Mr. Freeman, finally, "you must at least acknowledge that poor Lucy is not so bad as she has been painted."

"That is not saying much, Giles," was her keen reply; "remember, she was an actress."

